



Though he walks well on limbs that are artificial below the knee, Emilio Milian sticks close to home these days, spending his time reading and writing.

TIM CHAPMAN/Miami Herald Staff

## Emilio Milian: Back on his feet

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**T**he telltale signs are few: a slightly stiff walk and a zigzagging brown scar on the inside of his left arm, just below the wrist. The memories are everywhere, though: in the plaques hanging in the paneled Florida room, in the scrapbooks containing scores of newspaper clippings, in his own mind, most of all.

Seven years after a terrorist bomb nearly killed him, Emilio Milian hasn't changed his mind about the intent behind the attack.

"I saw it then, and I still see it, as an attempt to silence me," he says.

Then, after a pause: "And they succeed-

**He says he has recovered physically and emotionally from the car bomb that almost killed him, but his dream of owning his own radio station still eludes him.**



Only months after the bombing, Milian rides in the grand marshal's car in the '77 Three Kings Parade, a celebration he organized. Five months later, WQBA fired him.

ed. In a way."

At 51, the broadcaster who once commanded the bulk of Latin radio listeners in this city is far from silent. But his principal forum these days is his own home.

Fourteen months after the April 1976 bombing, WQBA, the station where Milian rose through the ranks until he became vice president of public relations, fired him. Since then, Milian's dream of starting his own radio station has been tangled in a web of battles with the Federal Communications Commission.

Once an active promoter and participant of Latin community events, a popular personality who frequently addressed conferences and conventions, Milian now rarely appears in public.

"I make much of my life at home. We frequently have friends over, just about every day. When I go out, it's usually to someone's home, for a gathering of friends. And we go to church functions. We only go out to very select places."

Last year, Miami Mayor Maurice Ferre appointed Milian chairman of a citizens committee to investigate the clash between Cuban exiles and police during a demonstration to protest the deportation

of a Cuban stowaway.

"It was my civic duty to participate and I think we did a fair job," says Milian.

But, he concedes, he prefers to stay out of the limelight until he is back "at the helm of a medium."

Over the years, he has made real estate investments that have paid off handsomely, allowing him to support his family.

"We've never lacked anything. After the accident, a lot of people wanted to raise money for us, but we've never needed financial assistance."

The family has lived at the same Northwest Miami home since 1971. The iron grillwork that covers the windows was installed long before the bombing, Milian says, as a deterrent to burglars. His telephone number has always been unlisted.

He is licensed to carry a revolver and has done so since before the bombing. But he stresses he does not fear further attempts on his life. "I don't think I'm a target now. And, besides, if someone is bent on trying to kill you, he will try anyway."

His days are spent reading and writing, for the most part. He reads several news papers but shuns the Spanish-language

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# Blast broke his body, but not his spirit

MILIAN / From 1C

broadcast media.

"I don't want to get used to it. I don't want it to color my own ideas, the ideas I have for my own station."

Milián plays down the bitterness when he speaks of the attack that changed his life seven years ago.

"I am, fundamentally, a man of great faith. Physically and mentally, my recovery has been complete. All of us — my wife and my children — talk freely about the bombing. No one is traumatized or haunted by it."

The mystery surrounding the incident never has been resolved. On April 30, 1976, Milián, who was then the news and program director at WQBA, turned on the ignition of the company station wagon he frequently used and a bomb ripped through the hood, virtually severing his legs and mangling much of his body.

Earlier this month, a Herald investigation of previously secret Justice Department documents revealed that an eyewitness reported seeing anti-Castro terrorist Gaspar Jimenez working on Milián's car shortly before the blast, but the informant was deemed "unreliable" by authorities, despite the fact that he passed 10 polygraph tests.

Milián says he has received scores of calls after the Herald article was published "from people who inevitably ask how can this happen in this country. I can only tell them I don't know."

Emma, his wife of 25 years, says: "None of us harbors any hatred. From the moment of the attack, we've all faced the fact that there's no going back, that you have to move forward and, with God's help, that's what we've done."

The three Milián children, however, complain about the handling of their father's case.

"You know, I'm a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves," says Alberto, 22, a senior at Florida International University who plans to go to law school in the fall. "A lot of my reasons for joining the Army were because I was very committed to what this country was about. It dampens my commitment when I see something like this take place."

"I'm bitter because nothing has been done. Nobody has been tried. Everything's in limbo," says Mirtha Mary, 19, a Miami-Dade Community College student.

"I realize nothing is going to bring his limbs back," says Emi-

lio, 23, also a student at FIU. "But I believe in justice."

Milián's broadcasting career began in a radio station at his hometown of Sagua La Grande, in Cuba's Las Villas province, where as a 15-year-old high school student, he was co-host of a program for young people.

After graduation, he enrolled at the University of Havana's medical school, but quit school to devote himself full time to broadcasting. By the time he left Cuba in 1965, he had acquired a reputation as a good newsmen with excellent delivery.

In Miami, he bought a print shop and worked part time at WMIE, a station that devoted part of its daily programming to Spanish-language news and commentary. By 1971, WMIE had become WQBA and Milián had become news director.

At WQBA, he was responsible for the station's editorials, news reports, daily commentaries and a handful of programs, including a phone-in talk show, "The People Speak."

WQBA's editorial position was then, as it is now, staunchly anti-Communist. But in his commentaries, Milián espoused a controversial philosophy: He repeatedly denounced terrorist actions in the name of liberating Cuba.

"I received death threats on the air," he recalls. "The police knew about the threats, and they told me they were keeping a watch on me."

The explosion nearly severed Milián's legs, tore a hole in his stomach and left gashes on his left arm and the left side of his face. In five months at Jackson Memorial Hospital, he underwent 11 operations, including the amputation of both legs below the knee, and stomach, eye and ear surgery.

By the time he emerged from the hospital, walking on artificial legs and aided by a cane, Milián had become a folk hero.

But upon rejoining WQBA in October 1976, the outspoken newsman, who had vowed repeatedly he would not be silenced by the attack, found his bosses did not share his zeal for rekindling the controversy.

Milián was promoted to vice president of public relations.

"I was kicked upstairs," he says. "At the beginning, I wasn't totally aware of what was going on. I kept expecting to go back on the air, as before. But they were afraid."

Herb Levin, WQBA's general manager at the time, says, "After the bombing, I felt that Emilio should not go back on the air in a



TIM CHAPMAN/Miami Herald Staff

Emilio Milián's family has always stood behind him: Emilio, 23; Mirtha Mary, 19; wife Emma; and Alberto, 22.

direct confrontation with the audience over the phone, for his own safety and the safety of other members of the staff."

Milián says that besides blocking his talk show appearances, Levin also tried to censor his editorials and commentaries, an allegation Levin denies. In June 1977, the rift between the newsman and the manager resulted in Milián's dismissal.

"I think he became embittered after the bombing, and I think he had every right to feel that. He chooses to focus some of his bitterness and anger toward me. But I don't have any problem with my conscience," says Levin, now the president of S.R. Associates Inc. and an owner of Spanish-language radio station WSUA. "I would probably do the same thing if I had to do it over again."

Milián has been frustrated in his attempts to get back on the air. Efforts to buy such stations as WFUN, WKAT and WWOK "fell through, for one reason or another."

Since 1978, he has been battling to get FCC approval for the license previously owned by WFAB. But although an administrative judge initially ruled in favor of Milián's New Continental Broadcasting Co., another group vying for the same license, New Radio America Broadcasting, won the license on appeal. Milián's company has since appealed, and a final ruling has not been issued.

The former broadcaster has not lacked offers to work at local Spanish-language stations, among them, WRHC. General manager Salvador Lew, who has known Milián since Cuba, would not disclose in what capacity he would employ Milián, but says he "would definitely have a place here."

"None of the offers have satisfied me," says Milián. "I don't want to limit myself. I want my

own medium, where I would once again be in control."

Those who know Milián professionally profess unanimous respect for him. They describe him as a highly competent, dedicated broadcaster and a morally upright man.

Eduardo Gonzalez Rubio, a WQBA newscaster since 1960, says Milián "knew his business and knew how to be in command. I'd have to say he never had any problems with true professionals."

"He was a very effective manager who was respected and admired by his staff," says Levin.

Others, who refused to be identified, said that while Milián was certainly effective, he was also exceedingly authoritative.

"I'd have to say that you couldn't find a better man to run a radio station. But I'd also have to say I wouldn't work for him. He's got a huge ego," says one former colleague.

One former member of the citizens committee said Milián "was arrogant" and "ran the meetings like a dictator."

However, Vince McGee, another member of the group, says he was impressed with Milián's "ability to handle not only the Cuban members of the panel but the others as well. He was able to strike a balance, to keep our debates in the proper perspective. If he had an ego, it didn't come out."

Milián is certainly confident in his own ability to regain the stature he once held in broadcasting.

"I know what the people want, and I am ready to go on the air tomorrow. I'm just waiting for the FCC ruling, and if that doesn't work out, I'll try again, with another station."

"Radio is my vocation. I might be successful in business, but that's not where my true vocation lies. You have to do what you love to do, and radio is what I love to do."