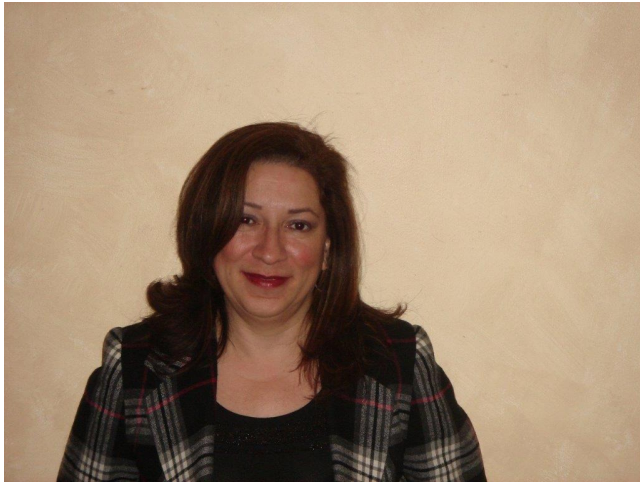


## **Donna Lorenzo**

### **Remembering Dr. Miguel Algarín**



I first met Dr. Algarín in my sophomore year at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. It was 1980. I had registered for one of his classes, I believe Puerto Rican Literature. I didn't know what to expect from this course, given that as a Nuyorican, being raised in Brooklyn, I didn't know much about Puerto Rican authors and poets. Jump forward to the mid-'80s. My soul-sister classmate Dr. Nancy Mercado was living in Jersey City, NJ. Nancy had a lovely second-floor apartment in a gorgeous craftsman-style house. I would visit Nancy

often, as we were always, till today, solid soul sisters. Nancy and Miguel exposed me to the world of poetry, especially Nuyorican poetry. I had no idea that a place like the Nuyorican Poets Café existed.

I remember one hot summer Friday night. Nancy had a poetry slam, party, or whatever it's called in the poetry industry. Her apartment was packed. There were appetizers, charcuterie, wine, and more wine. She has stellar poets there that evening.

As the night started, we heard poets read. There must have been 15 to 20 poets or even more. So I chilled lying on the couch. Finally, I drifted off into a delicious nap and awoke to Dr. Algarín, ending the evening with many of his poems. The best was saved for last. As I awoke, Dr. Algarín pointed me out with the comment: "Thank you, Ms. Lorenzo, for your non-verbals on poetry." My intention was not to be rude; it was a long day of work with overtime and Nancy's comfortable couch followed by many glasses of wine.

Dr. Algarín did not take it personally as I dozed off that night. We would meet on occasion for many years, and he always embraced me with a warm hug, a sweet kiss on the cheek, and a loving smile. That's the kind of person he was. He was always respectful towards his students at Rutgers and gave us the respect other professors would not give to students of color.

I remember another incident. This one was the early 90's. I went with Nancy to the city. We both lived in Jersey City, NJ, at the time. We went to Miguel's apartment. I was so excited to see his apartment in Loizada. When Miguel answers the door, it's dark behind him. So Nancy and I walk in, and it's pitch black. Immediately, I screamed: "Someone get me a fuckin walking stick; I can't see shit in here." The building had lost electricity earlier that day. ConEd was dispatched, and we chilled in a dark apartment, having a great time.

I will always be indebted to Dr. Algarín. He opened a world of the arts for me that I did not know about. He had stellar poets, authors, and thespians as guest speakers in his courses at Rutgers

University. If it were not for him, I would have never known about Pedro Pietri, Miguel Pinero, Piri Thomas, and so many other artists whom I had never heard about. Even though I was raised in Bushwick, Brooklyn, people who were artists that reflected my community were never guest speakers in my public school classes.

As an educator directing educational opportunity programs such as the Upward Bound Project and the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund programs at major New Jersey institutions of higher education, I make it a point to expose my students to artists of color. I have former students, especially one who is a tenured professor at a university in Pennsylvania, who told me, if it weren't for you, Ms. Lorenzo, I would have never been exposed to Puerto Rican writers and poets. I shared with him that I was emulating the GIANTS in my educational experiences like Dr. Miguel Algarin, who exposed me to the world of Puerto Rican poets and authors.

Thank you, Miguel. Your light continues to shine.

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In the last 23 years, **Donna Lorenzo** has authored proposals that have raised over 18 million dollars in federal, state, and private funds for Montclair State University. Her constant dedication to helping low-income and first-generation students prompted her to establish a new Upward Bound Program at the University in 1999; that promotes preparation for undergraduate curricula in health, science, mathematics, and technology. Lorenzo has worked for 38 years in the field of secondary and postsecondary education, primarily in the area of STEM. Currently, as the Director of the Health Careers Program at Montclair State University, she works with low-income and first-generation college-bound students pursuing a health profession and or seeking admission to health professions schools.