

Jani Rose



Miguel was many things to many people – Nuyorican Poet, Lover, Scholar, Professor, son, friend, mentor.

Despite facing the most cataclysmic challenges, his passion, and joie de vivre were infectious, inspiring generations of poets and musicians, playwrights and actors, to express and share. Even if I had never met him during my first experiences at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in 1993, and later in the early 2000s, his work would still have been one of the most influential of my life, as its existence made me feel confident that there was value to my stories, my art, my voice.

Algarín was brilliant and funny. A refreshingly honest person who would yell out and banter with the poets on stage, sometimes heckling, usually encouraging. How exciting it was to hear him holler and cackle, to praise and sometimes, reprimand. He gave me the courage to do the same from time to time, to interact with the poets, to snap and critique. One of the most important things I learned from him is to keep the greeting when you step up to the mic short and sweet, and **JUST READ THE POEM!** This would be one of the most important performance lessons we would teach at my workshop series, La Sopa.

He'd ask me to bring him new poems and thus it began. What a great honor; watching him pour over my words, thin, gold rimmed glasses close to the tip of his nose, reading choice parts aloud, telling me where to open it up, and where to clip. Afternoons sipping cold vodka with a few friends, in his apartment sharing poems. The first time I visited, I was empty handed and he rebuked me! How dare pay a visit to someone's home without a token of appreciation. I turned around, headed out, and returned as quickly as I could holding a nice tall clear bottle of vodka. And we would go in. He would listen with his eyes closed, and "Mmm" – Something I would come to do like a daughter respecting tradition. The Summer of 2010, when we were preparing for his "69 Years Young" birthday celebration in September, Miguel and I were sitting on his bed, camera rolling, and he stopped me, gently but abruptly, as I began my poem. On the wall there hung, on a nail, a necklace: large black, transparent stones threaded onto a shiny black ribbon. Each one the size of a large egg, cool in the palm, looked dark and sooty until he held them to the light. They were clear amethyst with black striations and gold flecks. Without saying a word, he removed the necklace from the nail, and gingerly placed it over my head. I closed my eyes and felt its weight – his energy. I looked at him and he had the slightest affectionate smile, "Now, read the poem" and I did, imbuing it with all of the sensibilities of that magical moment. I felt like a Knight of Nuyorican Poetics. I thought he was just allowing me to wear it for the moment, but he blessed me with this mystical necklace. Gifted it to me and I would wear it to that birthday party, and to so many more events, always feeling his energy close when I wore it, always feeling the "Tru cu tun cu tun cu tun" of it all.

Sometimes when things became difficult I cradled and caressed them, meditating and hoping, healing and growing – feeling his energy and love. One of my greatest heartaches was the moment I realized that I no longer knew where my necklace was. It was so heavy that if I wore it in the summer, sometimes I would take it off, carrying it around like an amulet blessing the space. There's a photo of it in my hands at a friend's birthday party; I fear that it was taken on the night that it disappeared. After it had waited so many years to find me and it was gone, living an adventure somewhere without me and Miguel.

Sometimes I close my hands and send my heartache out into the universe, praying that someone somewhere finds it and brings it back to me. Sometimes, I ask him to find it and bring it home. It gives me hope, to fantasize that he would find a way, through the magic of poetry, community, y cultura – to bring us together again. Imagining the cool, smooth stones in my hands, I close my eyes and imagine his voice, tender and breathy reminding me that I am part of his legacy. I am determined to do everything I can to make him proud, to live up to his wildest Nuyorican dreams.

Jani Rose (Perez Rosado), a Nuyorican poet, artist, activist, educator, cultural organizer, and curator, is a Fellow of The Acentos Poetry Foundation, Pink Door Writers, and VONA: Voices of Our Nation Arts Foundation. Former member of Capicu Culture, she co-founded and co-directed the Capicu School of Poetic Arts, also known as La Sopa. Jani has featured and hosted at The Capicu People's Open Mic, The Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Bowery Poetry Club, the New York Poetry Festival on Governors Island, Camaradas, and The Schomburg. Currently she is collaborating with the Miguelabration Committee on the creation of an events series celebrating Miguel Algarín. Her work is published in the first anthology of Nuyorican women poets: Poetry Dossier published by Hunter College, CUNY, and in The Breakbeat Poets, Vol. 4 LatiNext Edition anthology. Jani is the author of Musings & Scribbles of a Nuyorican Geisha.

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