

Lois Elaine Griffith

Recuerdos del Poeta Miguel Algarín – Some Sundays and Other Days Back in the Day



El Poeta makes theater out of a trip to the bodega for a Bud – engaging everyone he meets – talking about Shakespeare and Critique of Pure Reason – and the b-boys on the corner doing runs to Coney Island – and should we mount another production of Shango de Ima – and who will appear to play the trickster who opens the door? He casts energy in his wake. So much gets caught in his wake. I get caught in his wake. Choosing to learn to give to love to live puts me in harm's way – always.

"Nuyorican Angel of Wordsmithing (Note for a Poet)" – "... Use the first person instead of the third if it isn't pathos...."

Love Is Hard Work has Midnight's picture on the cover. Arlene Gottfried took the picture. She has studied Midnight in and out of the joint – has made her own book about Midnight. Arlene has a thing for gospel music – brings her gospel choir-buds to the Cafe to shake the walls – reinforce the foundations. Her Midnight on the cover of Love... is a shadow of many midnights for him – El Poeta. And between his covers of Love... are angels in America and the hard and soft of August days. So much gets thrust into August. Dis-ease in August contaminates Sundays – the rainbow carrier. His dis-ease contaminates with the aching bittersweet infection of leftover love. Now the infestation transferred to my memory – leaks.

Sunday afternoon after winter we walk in Central Park, hunting for congeros. Everybody knows they bring their drums to the park for pick-up rumba circles. We can't find the drummers. They must have known this Sunday the sky would open hard cold spring rain in the park. Too early for Bethesda Fountain to be filled. He says: Let's climb under the eaves – between the pillars – under the angel's feet. We crouch there waiting until the rain stops. Have we missed Mr. Balanchine's matinee scattering Jewels on Lincoln Center's stage?

Sunday afternoon – he lies about the red gingham shirt. August comes to collect him from my house and he lies about having left things with me so he can change the present into what he reclaims. August doesn't know El Poeta went to the pawn shop for the gold bracelet that Miky hocked – and has given it to me.

Sunday afternoon at the beach in Maine with his nephew Grafton and Phil Smith. We're on a roadtrip to house-sit outside Portland. He knows better than to try that North Atlantic, even with all the summer heat it has collected. After sea bath I am frozen. Shiver on the hot sand. Hard nipples outlined through the swim suit. It's a joke – vacilón en la mañana radio talk. I am the men's joke. Don't forget I am a woman but there's no need to say: I told you so.

Sunday afternoon we walk from the Lower East Side uptown to 42nd Street. He has matinee tickets for his friend Luis Valdes' Zoot Suit on Broadway. It's before the theater strip becomes Disneyland. We have time to kill. He says: Let's catch a peep show. He springs for a cup of quarters. We enter a dark booth that smells like a Port Authority bathroom. He drops quarters in a slot. Someone on the other side of the wall opens our small square of window. Village People pound the disco beat. The damp sticky floor under our feet is too slippery for any fast moves. We huddle together and peep at the naked girls dancing. France Joli has a hit: "Come to Me".

Sunday afternoon and he's staying at Irma's house when she's living in Little Neck. She has gone to church with her teenage sons. After church they go to fetch Don Miguel, Doña María and Uncle Al. We wait for their return. El Poeta laughs about hemorrhoid surgery and reads me a new poem he's written: "... Sunday afternoon... and all the churchgoing latinos fuse each other with love... and everything so right and pure..."

Sunday afternoon and he's staying at Irma's house when she's living in the Bronx. The undertakers send Miky Piñero's ashes to her address. He says to come over for a look-see. El Poeta opens a paint can filled with pale gray dust and small pieces of what look like broken shells. He reaches in – lets the fine dust coat his fingers. He tells me to touch it. We are like children filled with wonder looking at a can filled with dust.

"Nuyorican Angel of Wordsmithing (Note for a Poet)" – "... Poet's Burial:/... Instructions for the ceremony should be written as a poem...." He has left stage directions with Arturo Lindsay for ritual theater of death.

El fin del prólogo del prólogo...
July 2021

Lois Elaine Griffith is a writer/artist living in Brooklyn, New York. She has been a professor of English at Borough of Manhattan College and is one of the founding poets of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. She has initiated the Nuyorican Poets Cafe Founders Archive Project.