

Mariposa



I met Miguel Algarín in the mid-1990s, sometime after meeting Pedro Pietri, Sandra Maria Esteves, and other founders of the Nuyorican literary movement. There was always an air of celebration around Miguel. To say he was the life of the party may sound cliché but it's true. Miguel was like a Happy Buddha who sat on a stool by the bar, laughing and having a good time. He would hoot and holla and yell at poets who hid behind their poems. "Get your head out of the book! Stop burying your head!" Or if the poet began relaying a long story about what inspired them, he'd join Steve Cannon in yelling, "Read the poem!" Miguel's greatest gift was that he created a space where we celebrated our lives, where we gathered, read our work. Scribble out new poems in tattered notebooks. We got to invite family and friends, to say "Check me out, yeah baby, this me. I'm a poet." We affirmed who we were. That is a big deal, at any age, especially for people who

continue to struggle against being marginalized and unheard. To stand on that stage in my mid 20s was the most freeing experience I could have had. It was a life-changing experience. For that, I am truly grateful to Miguel Algarín.

I think to recall Miguel Algarín simply as the founder of the Nuyorican Poets Café, is a bit of an understatement. Miguel was one of the keystone founders of a literary movement that celebrated our freedom as Puerto Ricans in New York City. Yes, they created an aesthetic and language. They created a whole vibe. They put the word Nuyorican in the dictionary and were generous to share it with others. I have fun and fond memories of helping Miguel promote his book *Supervivencia*. The road trips to Hartford, Connecticut, and to Allentown, Pennsylvania were a trip. I loved his stories about Jorge Brandon and his laughter. An unforgettable man and a Nuyorican poet for the ages, I will always be inspired by him. And I will teach his work for as long as I have the privilege and blessing to teach.

Mariposa María Teresa Fernández is an award-winning Afro Puerto Rican poet, spoken word performance artist, visual artist, educator, activist, scholar and Bronx native. Her poetry has been published in *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle and Song*, *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, *The Afro Latin@ Reader: History & Culture in the United States*, *Manteca: Anthology of AfroLatin@ Poets*, *Bumrush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam* and *Latinas: An Anthology of Struggles and Protests in 21st Century USA*. She is the author of *THE POINT 25 Years! A historical narrative of THE POINT CDC*. Her poetry has been featured on HBO Latino in the critically acclaimed series *Habla Ya!*