

## Ricardo Muñiz HOMENAJE, A Tribute to Miguel Algarín



“Mira, come over here and hold my hand,” says the great Miguel Algarín to me as he, Nancy, Carlos and I are walking together looking for a bar that has really good margaritas for a happy hour price. Miguel is one of the founding fathers of the whole Nuyorican poetry movement and he is the father of the Nuyorican Poets Café. It is not every day I have the opportunity to hold hands with a god.

“No, no, not like that. Like this.” Miguel separates my fingers with his so that each of ours is intertwined. He pulls me close and begins to speak in a soft whisper, the words slowly stretching and flowing like melted caramel poured over apples.

“When I see what you see,” Miguel drawls, “the distance between us disappears.”

After the slightest of pauses, he begins to walk and drags me along, “Okay, let’s go. I want a margarita.”

Miguel is the author of more than ten published books of poetry and the editor of several anthologies including *Aloud*, considered by many to be the bible of street/urban poetry. He has received three American Book Awards and he is the first Latino to win the Before Columbus Lifetime Achievement Award. If he needs to hold onto me as he walks, I am honored.

We make it maybe five steps before he stops me again. “That pretty blonde hair, that walk, that smile – you are the sun that shines and warms my heart.”

I’m not blond, so I’m confused for a second until I see a pretty blonde in my peripheral vision. She turns and smiles at Miguel as she passes me on the left. Miguel smiles back.

“Thank you for your grace and beauty. Thank you for making an old man feel young.”

The pretty blonde’s boyfriend squeezes her hand tighter. Miguel does the same with mine.

I look at Miguel and I ask myself, “Wait a second. Is the great Miguel Algarín only holding my hand, so that he has an excuse to flirt with every fulana on the street?”

As if reading my thoughts, Miguel turns to me, “Those eyes. Those lips. Which one will you let me kiss first? The top one? The bottom? You choose. I wait with anticipation.” He winks. I smile.

We continue holding hands and walking and talking. The Professor Emeritus of Rutgers University, the man whose mission it has been to enlighten and empower his people, the man who has fostered and motivated artists of the spoken and written word for nearly forty years; this man continues to hold my hand as we walk the streets of the Lower East Side. He doesn't let go until we are at least one block away from the margarita bar.

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**Ricardo Muñiz** currently works as a therapist in a community mental health clinic in the South Bronx. If you have the unfortunate luck of meeting him in person, he'll probably tell you how amazing he is, and he'll brag about his days (those days are way back, oh) of his being some stupid gogo boy in Ibiza, Spain, and some ratchet muscle-bound sex therapist on swinger cruises. They are all lies. Just nod your head, and say, "Oh, my." In truth, he's short, fat, ugly, and bow-legged, but, I will give him this: he has done some pretty good work for communities of color as a teacher, artist, community activist and social worker. He also founded the CHULO Underwear charity brand which donates its profits to local CBOs and NGOs working with marginalized young people of color. So, if you have a culo, and we know you do, call him up, and you, too, can model your culo for CHULO. @chulounderwear on Instagram, TikTok and Facebook <http://www.ricarto.com>