



Our Interview with Poet

Jose Yrizarry



***My culture has always had what's called "troubadours."
Like a voice in the wilderness crying out.***

Sally from the Norwalk Public Library: Thanks for joining us on the Poetry Page, Jose! I met you through our 2019 inaugural **Art &Text Exhibit** at the Norwalk Public Library. Your lovely poem, “Silent Still,” was printed in our Art & Text booklet. Other than that, I know so little about you!

I believe you are a Latino poet? Please tell us a little about your culture, and the role you feel poetry plays in the Latino community. I am so happy to be featuring you because I would like to feature poets from all cultures, and bring them into the library. This is so important!

Jose: I am what they call Nu Yor Rican, what Puerto Ricans often call those like me. It means my parents were born in Puerto Rico, but I am Nu Yor Rican (like a half- breed). That has worked in my favor. As a Latino from New York and Puerto Rico, I can remember parts of my life connected to both worlds; I deliver a melting pot on paper. My culture, going as far back as Spain, has always had what’s called “troubadours” – artists who poetically, and politically, sang community news from town to town. Like a voice in the wilderness crying out. It has evolved in many ways but I feel my writing, often in a form of advocacy, hinges on that tradition. Throughout the Latin countries, people are still connected—or familiar— with the tradition.



Sally: Jose, that is so lovely. I love the idea of the troubadour.

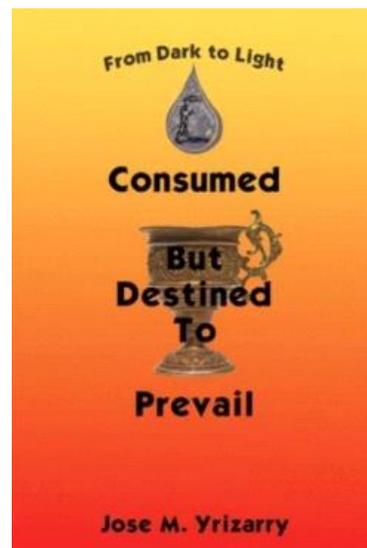
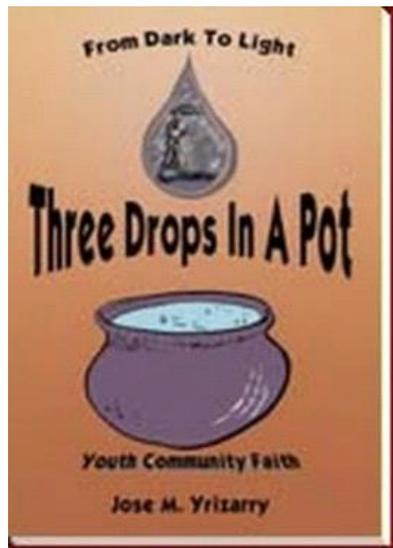
I feel that poetry can bring all walks of life together. Do you feel this way?
Poetry is universal?

Jose: Yes, much of my own work reflects a commitment to fostering unity— or illustrates a lack, thereof.

Sally: I know that you have a few books published. Please tell us about them!

Jose: *Drops in a Pot* is a poetic collection of my experiences with young adults as a teacher. It was intended to persuade teachers to consider what their students might be experiencing. The first chapter was performed as a play in a community event in the Bronx.

Consumed but Destined to Prevail is a poetic collection of my experiences with young adults as an addiction counselor.



Sally: I love how you wish your poetry to instill empathy, Jose.

Did you write poetry as a child, or did it come to you later in life?

Jose: I started journaling my daily events—with scattered poetic pieces—in my thirty's. Periodically reviewing past entries, I started

finding poems worth developing. From that point, I was off to the races— banging out poems almost daily.

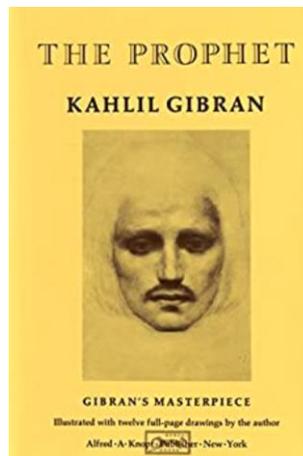
Sally: “Banging out poems almost daily!” Wow, that’s amazing. Who are your favorite poets? Why?

Jose: Kahlil Gibran: he wrote stories in poetic fashion.

Pedro Pietrie: he wrote about the Puerto Rican experience during the 60s and 70s.

Robert Frost: I was given, and often listened to, an album of him reciting his works when I was young.

Amiri Baraka: a Stonybrook professor who wrote political advocacy.



Sally: What are a few of your favorite poems?

“On Children,” by [Kahlil Gibran](#)

“Puerto Rican Obituary,” by [Pedro Pietrie](#).

“At the bottom of the ocean there is a railroad of skin and bones,” by [Amiri Baraka](#).

Sally: On researching you a little for this interview, I came across the website [POETRY ALIVE](#).

Tell us about this website. I found it quite inspiring, especially the [Mandingo](#) page!

Jose: Once I realized that my yahoo email account offered a domain, using some of their templates I spent months studying, experimenting, and eventually creating the *Poetry Alive* website (I did all this in the Norwalk Public Library!). I wanted to share and advocate my view of the world, to inspire others, and to secure speaking engagements. Eventually, a publisher visited my site, and became interested in my work, and nursed me through the process of publishing and using my site to promote my books. That same person recruited me to edit and maintain a column I called “Mandingos and Mandingas” in a community paper we developed: *The New Tomorrow*. The idea was that local people would look around at their peers, find someone they felt deserving of recognition, and then submit that person for a possible interview. We would select one person from the submissions each month, and by publishing our interview with them we were placing them on a pedestal for all to see! Our hopes were that others would be inspired by their contributions to the community.

Sally: That’s great! I’m sure you did inspire others! And still do!

I believe you are a student? I remember when I was putting the **Art & Text** booklet together you had written me saying you were so busy with your studies, and apologized for being late in getting back to me. Please tell us a little about what you are studying.

Jose: From my early years on, I was in and out of colleges and training programs, studying Sociology/Deviant Behavior. As I was developing skills for working with young adults, I was grandfathered into positions as teacher/counselor in NY community-based organizations, and alternative schools. Such work in Connecticut requires specific credentials that I had never earned: I was always interested in learning the information that I wanted to apply in the field, but I had never focused on a degree. I am currently enrolled in Norwalk Community College (NCC). They accepted some of my past credits, and placed me on a general AA with intent to transfer to either UConn or Southern University, this time with a major in Social Work and a minor in Social Psychology.

Sally: Good for you, Jose. It is never too late to earn a degree, and I know you are an inspiration to all of the young people that you work with. And think of all the experience you have to bring to your degree!

You mentioned your **poetry videos** to me, and I see that you have many of them! Please tell us a little about these videos.

Jose: I started creating the videos out of a desire to broaden the presence of my message, and I also wanted to attract a new audience—a new following— before submitting my next book for publication: *HeartDrops*.

Jose's videos can be found on his website [POETRY ALIVE](#)



Sally: I love that title, *Heartdrops*. Are there any poetry communities— like **BRAG**, for example—that you are involved in? Poet Ezra Lovecroft is very involved in the poetry community, and holds a lot of open mic events (we had one scheduled at the library, but then we had to close due to COVID!). Have you ever participated in those? Do you hold your own events? I think I saw online that you have been involved with the Curley's group? Can you tell us about Curley's?

Jose: I would like to, but I have not participated in poetry communities. The COVID pandemic dashed my hopes for speaking engagements. Curley's is a Greek diner in Stamford that hosted a poetry group on Tuesday nights; it now holds its sessions virtually on Zoom.

Sally: I'm so sorry I had that information wrong. I hope that once we reopen, and get back to having public events, that you will read your work at the Norwalk Public Library, and attend our open mics!

Young people are obviously so important to you. Please tell us how you instill poetry in children!

Jose: I send poetic thoughts to kids in cards every month, and share with them the fact that it is not poems that I write, but experiences—and emotions—that I wish to share with the world. I tell them that they, too, can do this, and should (without trying to project myself on them).

Sally: What are your interests outside of poetry?

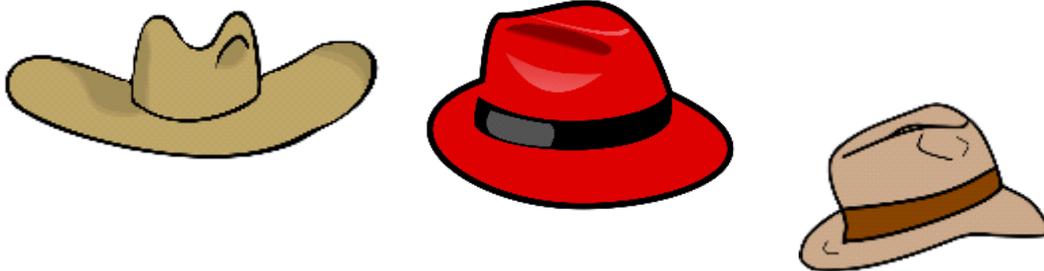
Jose: Church, hiking, biking, independent studies/research on anything I need— or simply want to know.

Sally: What advice might you give to a young poet?

Jose: Just let it all out on paper—or a recorder—and *then* work on the mechanics. Write it three times, recite it until it fits, until it becomes alive!

Sally: Okay, here is a fun thing! I notice you wear the same great hat—or, at least you always wear a hat! - in your photographs, and videos—tell us about your hat(s)!

Jose: Hats (a large collection!), vests, long hair, and beard have all been part of my trademark for years. As they say, “hard to teach an old dog new tricks!”



Now, a selection of Jose’s poems...

Puerto — Puerta Rica!

Puerto — Puerta Rica! Portal to my soul
Where lands of milk and honey flow far from the city cold
Where roots of fruits and nuts grow far from the city rut
Where shores so blue and sandy white spread far from the city fight
Where sun so browns my skin ... far from old learned ways of sin

Puerto — Puerta Rica! Portal to my soul
Caribbean pit stop where I, in my mind or live
Bajo palma trees full of cocos forget the locos and the jive
Of me and he who always said “Who Am I”

Puerto! Puerta Rica! Portal to my soul
Where in swaying hammock free of worries, cares and fears
Rememba brothers and sisters so dear but still back there
Where long haired, copper toned and alone my very own
“Pete & Maria”

Puerto — Puerta Rica! Portal to my soul
Where suddenly I find me feeling low and cold
Sold! Like a slave that ran but no where near home
How I see where he stood saying “I simply Don’t Belong”

Puerto — Puerta Rica! Portal to my soul —
Can’t you see I must decide!
How can I simply run and hide while left behind my pride
While mine - to concrete and chalk lines left behind to die
Jive is my delight if “Now” I don’t decide

Puerto — Puerta Rica! Portal to my soul
At all cost - we need to bring about “A Rose”
At all cost — we need to bring about “A Bam”
At all cost — we need to break the “Wanna Be Jive”
And find the “Grand River Red”

Jose Yrizarry
From *Three Drops in a Pot*

The Grand River Red

I walk with the infinite hand in hand
I dwell both at the heights of kings and the pits of their lowest subjects
While constant through the valleys of laborers, nobles and lords I run

I carry the message of life's essence in seeds upon my back
I collect the spent residue of mortal remains just the same
As I roar and whisper along the path of existence from beginning to end

I never go astray nor tarry along the way
I do not fret the coming of tomorrow nor linger with remorse for yesterday
And today is but a fleeting moment,
a shadow between what was and what will be

I am the echo of forefathers and the voice of offspring's in the distance
I am the coffin of bones put to rest, transformed to shells in my bed
And the womb from which new pearls to the world are fed

I am the grand river red
That which lingers dormant in the back of your head
That which calls on to you – that which you call upon with unspoken words
That which escapes the charts of maps and eludes you wildest dreams

I am the grand river red – made eternal by the infinites spell
The portal, the gateway to the mystic realms of heaven
And the mental gates of hell
Where only the chosen willing few can drink from my bitter sweet well

I am the grand river red – able to transform and transport it all
The collected dead bones of knowledge – endlessly recorded and recited
To the vibrant chambers of wisdom – the future in sighted and exploited

Jose Yrizarry
From *Three Drops in a Pot*

A Prophecy Fulfilled

There they stood,
 The blind that saw
 The deaf that heard
 With crippled legs that walked
Where others could but would not dare
 To brave
 Where mind to press beyond confines
 Where heart to burden all to feel
 Where soul to fly unfathomed heights
 To be
Have nots among the haves
 That cling to things
 That bind and chain their sum
Beneath life's ever passing waves
Beneath the sands of time
Beneath what man was meant
 To reach, to teach, to keep ...
 A Prophecy Alive
No need to wonder why
 So many in divide, survive
 So many in divide, find compromise
 So many in divide, must die
 By misguided swords and shields
 That yield the devastating blows
 On those that would not bend or rend
 Their choice to serve an economic race
 That beckons them to chase each others lives
 To take and take and take until erased
 Alternatives that could in-deed
 Bring every act beyond the creed of greed
 Where to agree would bring
 The sound of Peace and Love to all
Were tossed aside – the FEAR
Were tossed aside – the HATE
Were tossed aside – the SHAME
 That fans the flames of anger and despair
 to torch and scorch
 Whatever comes to simply disagree
 And yet there stood the three –
There they stand
 The blind that saw
 The deaf that heard
 With the crippled legs that walked
Where others could but would not dare
 To brave and sacrifice it all to be
 What man was meant to reach, to teach, to keep
 A Prophecy Fulfilled

Jose Yrizarry
From *Consumed but Destined to Prevail*



Thank you, Jose!

