
BNN Blog: Puerto Rican Weekend 2009, Tainos and Me!

Contributed by Olga Ayala - Blacktino.net
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The rain in New York has been relentless these last few weeks but nothing could put a damper on the building excitement for what is easily one of the biggest and festive weekends the city has to offer... Puerto Rican Weekend!

Sometimes living in Staten Island makes me feel like I'm the only Boricua out here, but come the month of June, all of a sudden, you see Puerto Rican flags everywhere! LOL!

The 116th Street festival kicks off the weekend with an event that stretches along 3rd Avenue from 106th Street north to 119th Street, and along 116th stretching from Lexington Avenue to 2nd Avenue, in effect forming a cross. I find this formation rather interesting as I envision a bird's eye view of Boricuas spread out in the formation of our most recognized and significant symbols of religious faith in the Puerto Rican Christian community.

Three stages (originally there were five), offer a cornucopia of local talent, youth dance groups, up and coming recording artists and A list bands. Food, T shirt and trinket vendors line the streets and local residents, mix with out of towners sporting their best Boricua gear. See and be seen is the order of the day!

The day started off comfortably warm and sunny, but by early afternoon threatening clouds had moved in and the sky burst open. The rain chased some of the revelers away, but many hung in there as the rain eased up beneath the looming clouds, continuing to celebrate pride in a shared heritage that isn't taught in history books. After a brief respite and second deluge I called it a day. I mean, after all, the parade is tomorrow I thought to myself.

While I was at the festival my daughter was at home having a barbecue with her guests. Being the internet junkie that I am, upon my return I promptly checked my email and found an invitation to march with Tainos in the parade! WOW! I was stoked! This was a first and I was excited! Yes! Yes! Thank you! I would be honored, I said. Then my daughter convinced me to join her friends in a friendly card game called "Circle of Death." OK... Let me break it down to

ya…… the deck gets shuffled, cards are spread out face down in a circle, there’s a list with the different card face values along with corresponding instructions and a huge bottle of rum and a shot glass. Let’s just say that I was a novice at this game and got reeeeeeeeeeeal familiar with that shot glass!

Fast forward to Sunday morning……

My eyelids slowly parted as I came to realize that I had a tremendous headache, aieeee, was still very nauseous, aieeee, and much to my surprise, still inebriated! Aiee ! Aieeee ! Aieeeeeee!

I was supposed to meet the group at 10:30 AM which meant I had to be up by 7 and out the door by 8, and it was now 7:10! I lay back down, head pounding, stomach queasy ….ugh! I thought….. no…. no…. I’m not going…… can’t do it! Then….. then I thought…. Wow, I see this parade every year. The parade, is in its 52nd year, it’s as old as me and I’ve seen almost each one! And here I was, with an invitation to be a part of it, to view the pride from a whole different view point! I was honored by the invitation and had given my word that I would be there.

I was going.

I don’t know how I did it, but I pulled myself together and off I went. The weather was gloomy, but hey, I wasn’t going to let that stop me either! I met Raul Kahayarix Rios at the designated spot along with the others that formed our small group. My head continued to pound and I dared not eat or drink anything! We waited four and a half hours before it was our turn to march, and in that time the weather, along with my head and stomach cleared up. As we waited we met up with friends and acquaintances old and new. It only took an hour and a half to march the two mile route, but it was worth it all!

The sight of thousands of our great rainbow tribe lining 5th Avenue, was, from a marching viewpoint, absolutely indescribable! The cheers and prideful shouts from the crowd upon seeing Tainos dressed in their regalia and blowing the guamo (conch shells which are used to salute the four winds in ceremonies) brought my feeling of national and cultural pride up to a whole new level. I’ve been invited to march again next year, and believe you me, I will be ready……. sober, and wearing my regalia!