"WE CAN ACHIEVE ANYTHING!"









A TRIBUTE TO MICHELLE MORALES

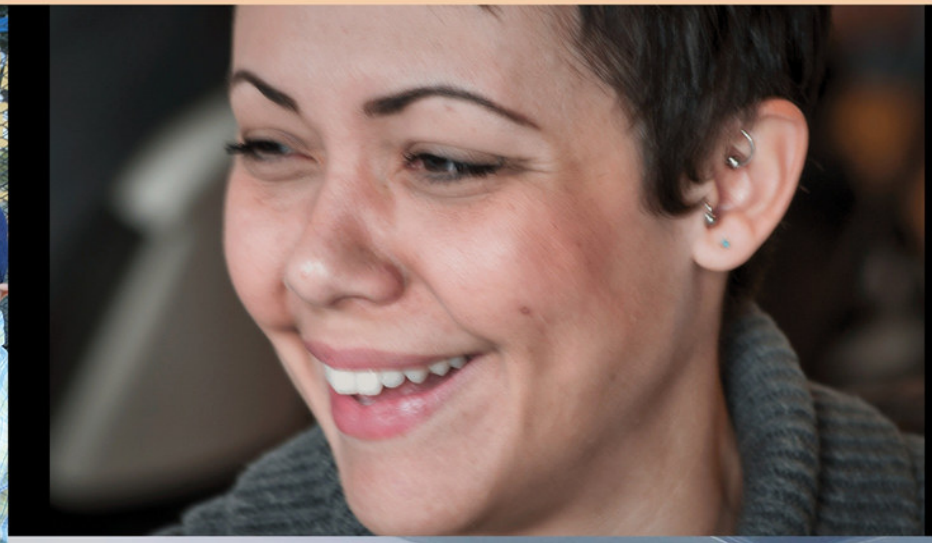
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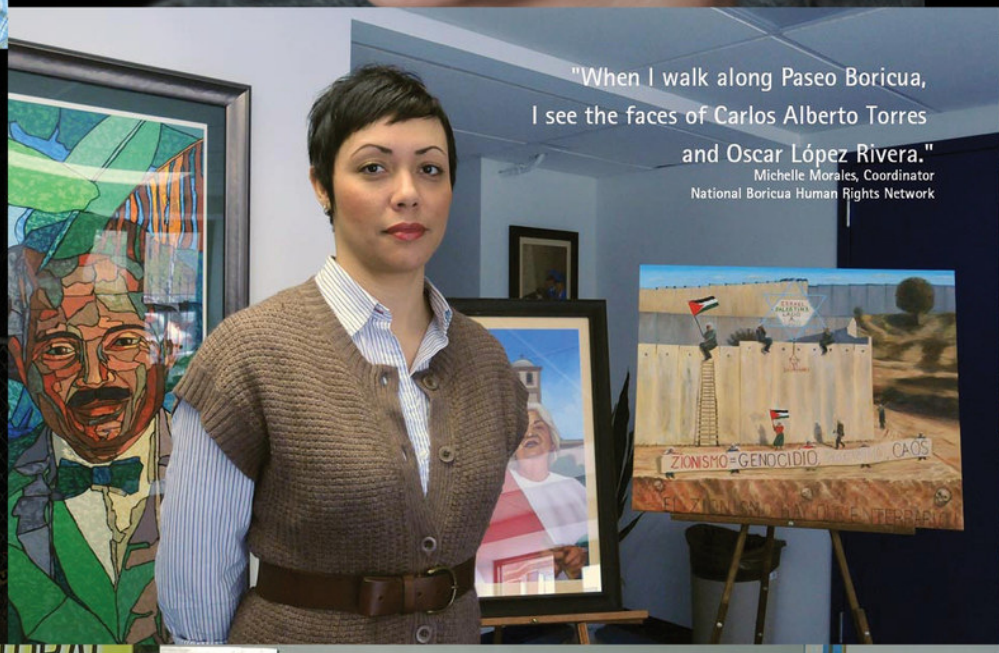
A Tribute to Michelle Morales

















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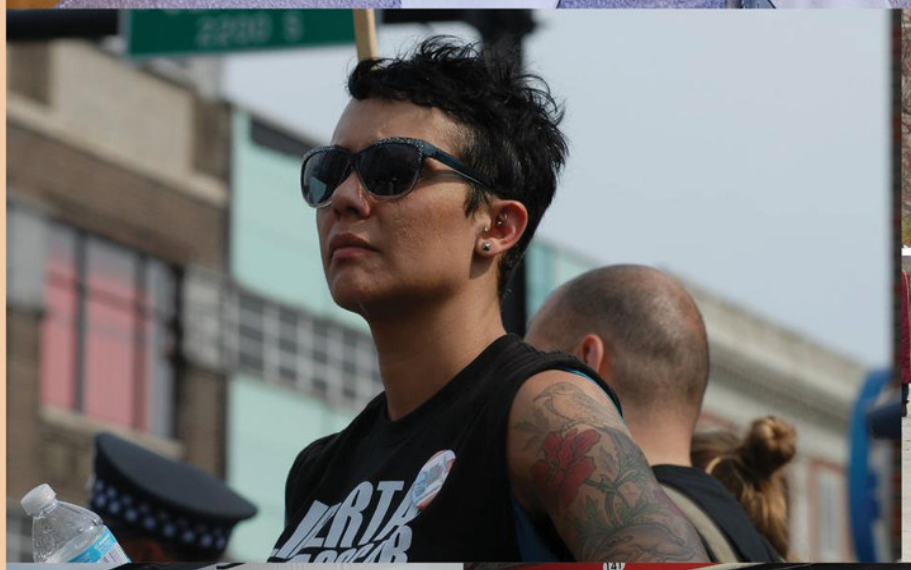
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Founded in 1973

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A Tribute to Michelle Morales



















"We Can Achieve Anything" (Originally published July 2010)

Michelle Morales

On July 26, 2010, our people, the Puerto Rican people, will celebrate yet another victory for our nation – the release of one of our compatriots, Carlos Alberto Torres. Carlos Alberto has been living behind bars for 30 years – 5 years less than my entire life. Because of his belief in the freedom of Puerto Rico, he has been devoid of a relationship with his daughter, with his sister, his niece, his grandchildren, his stepmother – something which I cannot imagine or perceive. The absolute absence of being able to kiss my son, or hug my mother or talk to my sister whenever I want to is completely outside my reality. But this is the reality that Carlos Alberto, and Oscar Lopez Rivera & Avelino Gonzalez Claudio, live with every day. I want to stress the word "live" because that is what they do, even behind bars. They live through their paintings, their ceramics, their wonderful letters to the outside, their phone calls.



The freedom of Carlos Alberto means more than I can express in this article. I have been privileged to be part of the amazing campaign to release Puerto Rican political prisoners since 1998. In 1999, when I was only 24 years old, I witnessed the release of the 11 compañeros. Since then, I have actually become friends and peers with those men & women that I had read about and looked up to. In 2003, I witnessed the victory of the people of Vieques ousting the U.S. Navy from their island. To be part of two amazing events early in my activism was truly astounding. It showed me how hard work & years of struggle will pay off and how truly incredible we, Puerto Ricans, are. I learned that we can achieve anything. We are the only people who have won the release of so many political prisoners – and now we can add Carlos Alberto to this list. And it has taught me that the impossible is never out of reach and that a new world is certainly possible. In the last 7 years, I have become friends with Carlos Alberto.

It started with simple correspondence, telling him about my work with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Chicago & the National Boricua Human Rights Network. But each time I would write him, he would send back such beautiful letters with words of encouragement and gratitude. I was taken aback by the beauty of those letters, of the gratitude of a man I had never met and had never met me. In the progressing letters, I sought advice from him and it was always received. And many times, when I was going through a rough time in life or in the work, I would receive a letter from Carlos Alberto with just the right encouragement and advice that I needed to continue. Many times I wondered how he, Oscar & Avelino timed such letters. How did they know what to say and when to say it and that it would correspond to what was happening in our lives? That, to me, is what is so amazing about them. Women and men who have spent so long behind bars, been deprived of so much, yet greet you with absolute love and warmth – two things that they have not allowed prison to take away from them. They could wallow in despair and bitterness, but they choose not to – they choose to live in love and to express that love. Love is what this release means to me. The love we, as the Puerto Rican people, have for Carlos Alberto, Oscar, and Avelino – the love that has helped us persist after 30 years and to never give up on their release. And their love for us, their families, for themselves, and ultimately, their great love for our beautiful Isla – Puerto Rico.

And yet, this release is also bittersweet. While I am ecstatic to finally meet Carlos Alberto, I am also deeply saddened that Oscar & Avelino remain in prison. Carlos Alberto's release cannot make us complacent. It must motivate us and give us the extra fire to push on and continue to fight for our remaining two compañeros – Oscar López Rivera & Avelino González Claudio.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales





















"We Can Achieve Anything!"

"More importantly, the campaign has taught me that nothing is impossible and that people and communities can move mountains" (Originally published January 2017)

Michelle Morales

On January 17, 2017, Michelle Morales wrote on Facebook, following the news of Oscar Lopez Rivera's release:

"Today I received the most incredible news – that Oscar Lopez Rivera will be freed. I will admit that towards the end I began to lose hope and began to emotionally prepare myself in case he didn't get released. There are those around me though that never lost hope – Luis Alejandro Molina and Oscar's brother, José López.

Out of my 41 years on Earth, 20 have been spent campaigning for Oscar and other political prisoners. Believe me that I know that there are many others who have dedicated many more years to this cause. Fighting for Oscar has always put things in perspective for me & has taught me a resolve that I cannot explain. I think of Oscar each year that passed, each birthday, each holiday. Oscar often helped me with the advice he gave me in many of the letters we exchanged. To think – he helped me. But that's how Oscar is.







More importantly, the campaign has taught me that nothing is impossible and that people and communities can move mountains. In those 20 years, I have been incredibly blessed to witness the release of the first batch of political prisoners in 1999, the US Navy leaving Vieques in 2002, the release of Carlos Alberto Torres in 2010, and now this. The campaign has taught me an innumerable amount of skills and has given me some of my closest friends – including ex-prisoners Ricardo Jimenez, Luis Rosa Perez & Edwin Cortes. Thank you to everyone who supported this. I'm just overwhelmed."



"The quality of her humanity is the gift she gives to all of us"

Carlos Alberto Torres

I met Michelle for the first time through a letter she wrote to me while I was serving a long sentence in a federal prison. Most correspondence between prisoners and their family and friends serves as a powerhouse of optimism, hope, and real connection with the outside world. Most prisoners I know cherished their letters. The absence of meaningful communication, however, can leave a person feeling disconnected or simply forgotten. Devoid of connection to the outside world, one can feel as though life is merely an existence while falling into a bottomless pit. Michelle's letters always conveyed so much support, hope, and enthusiasm that it was easy to avoid ever tipping over the edge.



A quality strongly present in Michelle's letters was her sincerity, which I came to admire and respect. Her words were clear, and the thoughts and human emotions they communicated were never in doubt. Whether our letters focused on political, social, or familial topics, her straightforwardness, goals, and the energy and commitment she brought to pursuing them were striking. I understood that a different, younger generation of activists was stepping into leadership roles in community work, fighting for Puerto Rico's independence and the freedom of political prisoners. It pleased my heart to discover that development.

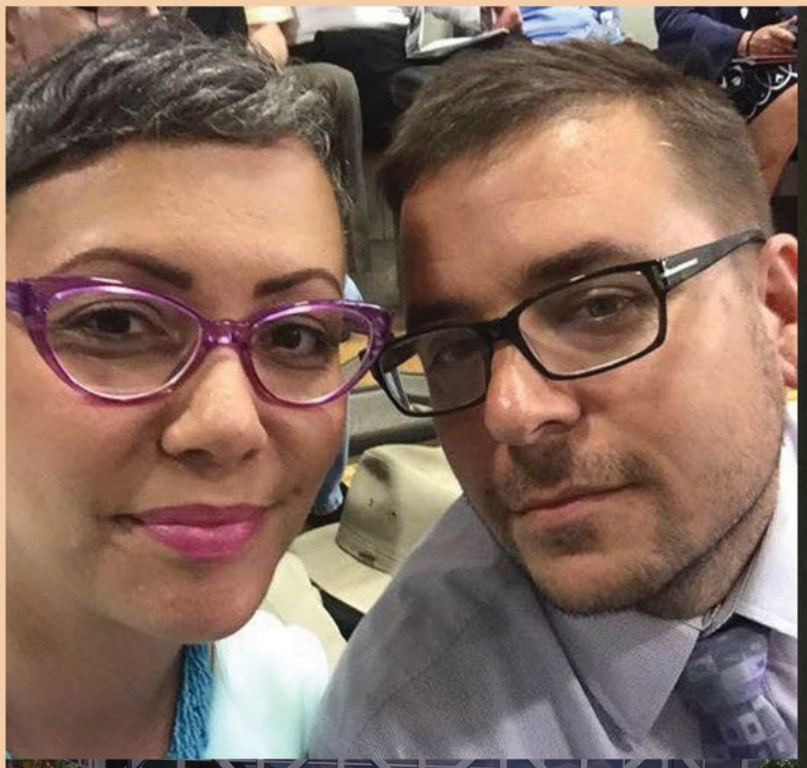
Through her letters, Michelle introduced me to her husband, Scott, and their children. Michelle's honesty when writing about her family and the struggles they faced was impressive, and her openness felt like a breath of fresh air. Her views on people and the world she was fighting for were admirable and inspiring. She wrote about her work with the NBHRN, a vital organization involved in the campaign to free political prisoners.

I met Michelle face to face for the first time on the day of my release from prison. After thirty years, I could breathe again. Both of us stood on the "balcón de la Casita de Don Pedro y Doña Lolita" on Division Street in Humboldt Park, Chicago. We were there to address and celebrate with the many people who came to mark our victory. The next day, I returned to live and work in Puerto Rico. Michelle continued her work creating educational alternatives and opportunities for young people who are often educationally forgotten and marginalized. She also continued the struggle to free Oscar López Rivera and Avelino Claudio González, an effort that contributed to their release from federal prison.

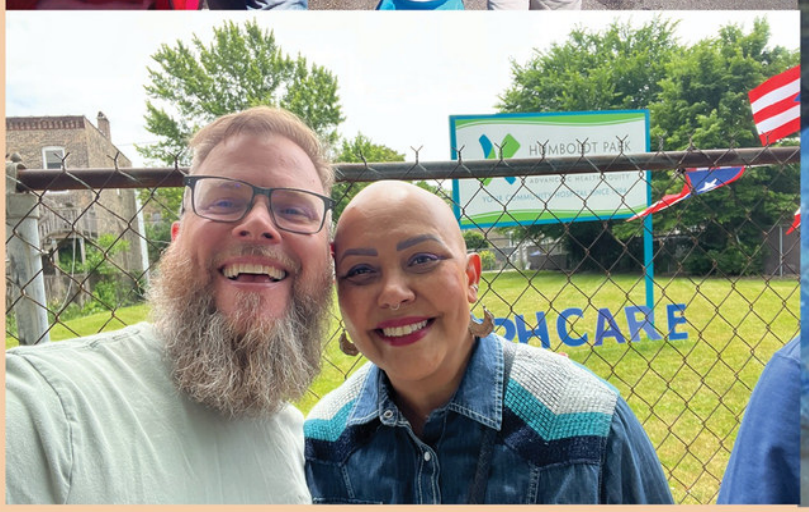
In more recent years, I became aware of the gravity of Michelle's health problems, which was shockingly sad news to hear. Yet, her response has been inspiring, remaining full of hope and optimism. I was so impressed by her honesty in publicly discussing the health challenges she faced.

I am so grateful to Michelle. She opened a window that let me see up close the life of a loving woman who struggled and defended her convictions, raised a family, and created meaningful educational opportunities for many. The quality of her humanity is the gift she gives to all of us.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales









"At every stop in her life both professionally and at home as a mother and love of my life, Michelle has been the heartbeat…"

Scott Greene

There aren't enough words to explain how Michelle has affected and influenced me. I will use this to convey the impact I've seen with my own eyes in the fight for a free Puerto Rico, the struggle to bring home Carlos Alberto and Oscar, her advocacy for youth voice at ASN and Mikva challenge, and the battle for racial equity here in Chicago through Woods Fund Chicago.

What I've seen in the 23+ years we've been together is not a warrior in the sense of someone on the front-lines battling it out. She has been the general, the logistician, the leader in the background always providing the right decisions and suggestions at the right times to win the battles. Usually those suggestions came either with or after her signature eyebrows would raise. It has been this way from the very first time we met in high school.

During our earlier years, I was always amazed at how many people knew her. Everywhere we went there were people who would





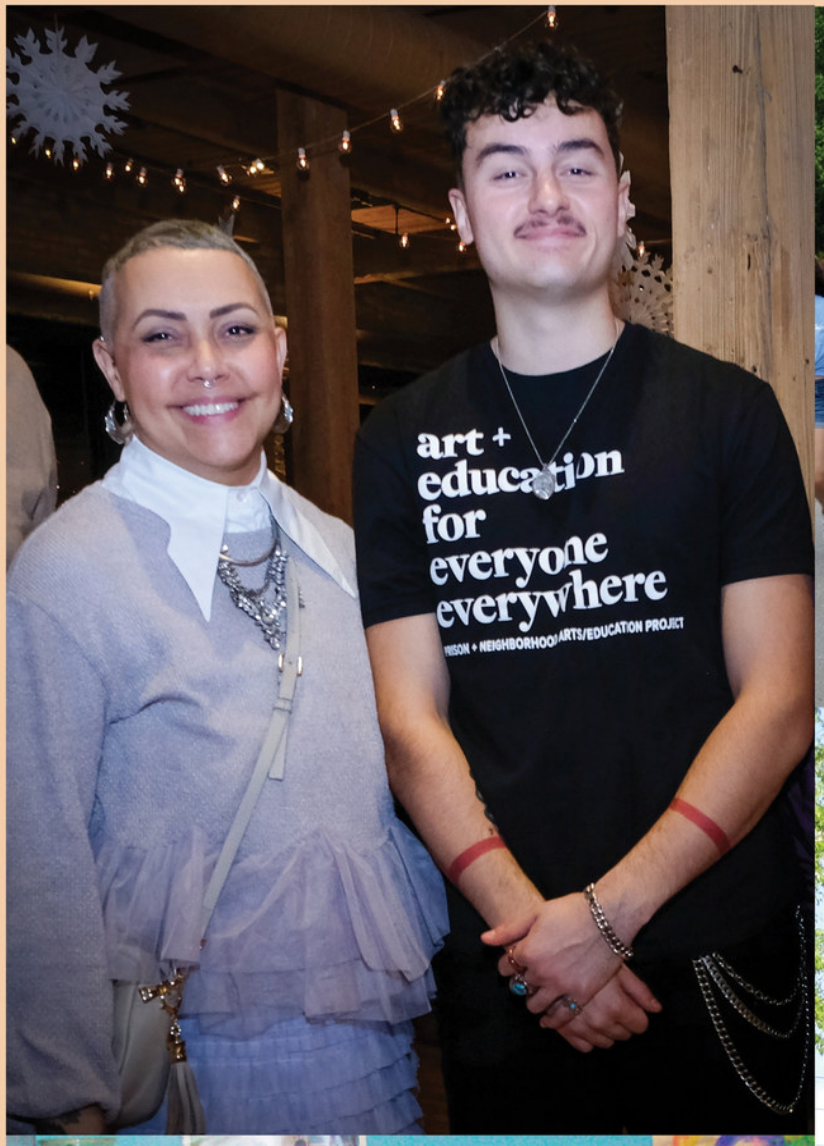


come up to say hi and get one of her famous hugs. From former students, to colleagues, to acquaintances, they always leaned in. Even on vacations. Even in other countries.

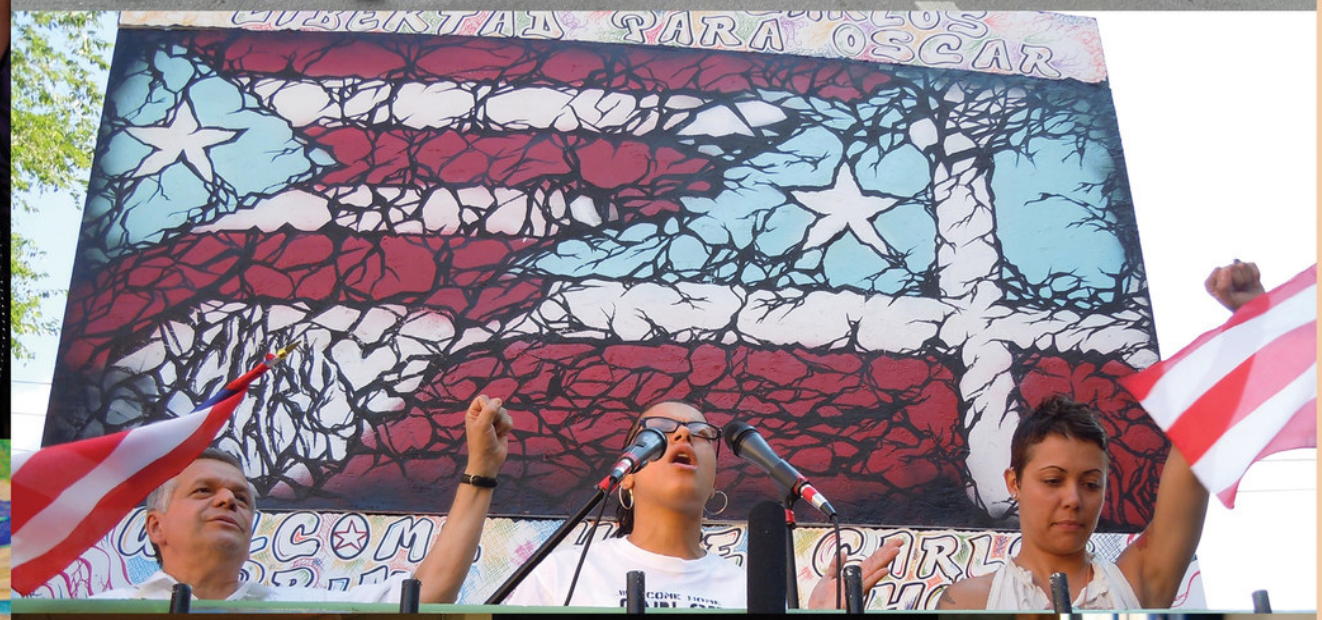
There were numerous times that I knew she was the "one" and just how dedicated she was to her work. The first was a conversation we had about "white privilege" that ended after a police officer should've impounded my car but let me go with a warning. Then there was the famous answering of a work call while in active labor… albeit after an epidural. Days after finishing that labor Xavi attended his first protest.

At every stop in her life both professionally and at home as a mother and love of my life, Michelle has been the heartbeat… I hope everyone understands that and remembers her as the great leader, mother, partner, friend, and woman she has been.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales

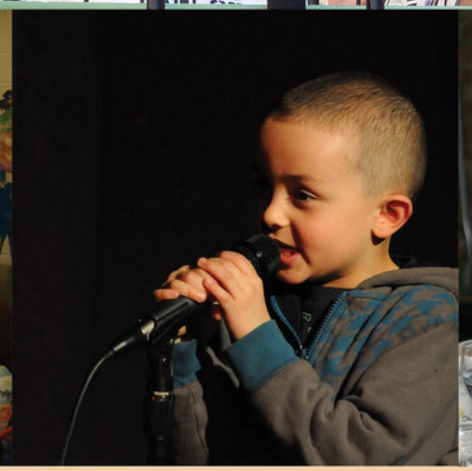














"Through the complexity and volatility of adolescence, I always knew Mami loved me, and I loved her"

Xavier Morales Greene



Just as others may express when trying to describe my mother, few words, phrases, or other expressive mediums can effectively encompass the character of my mother Michelle. Being her son, I will first share my experience with Michelle, the mom.

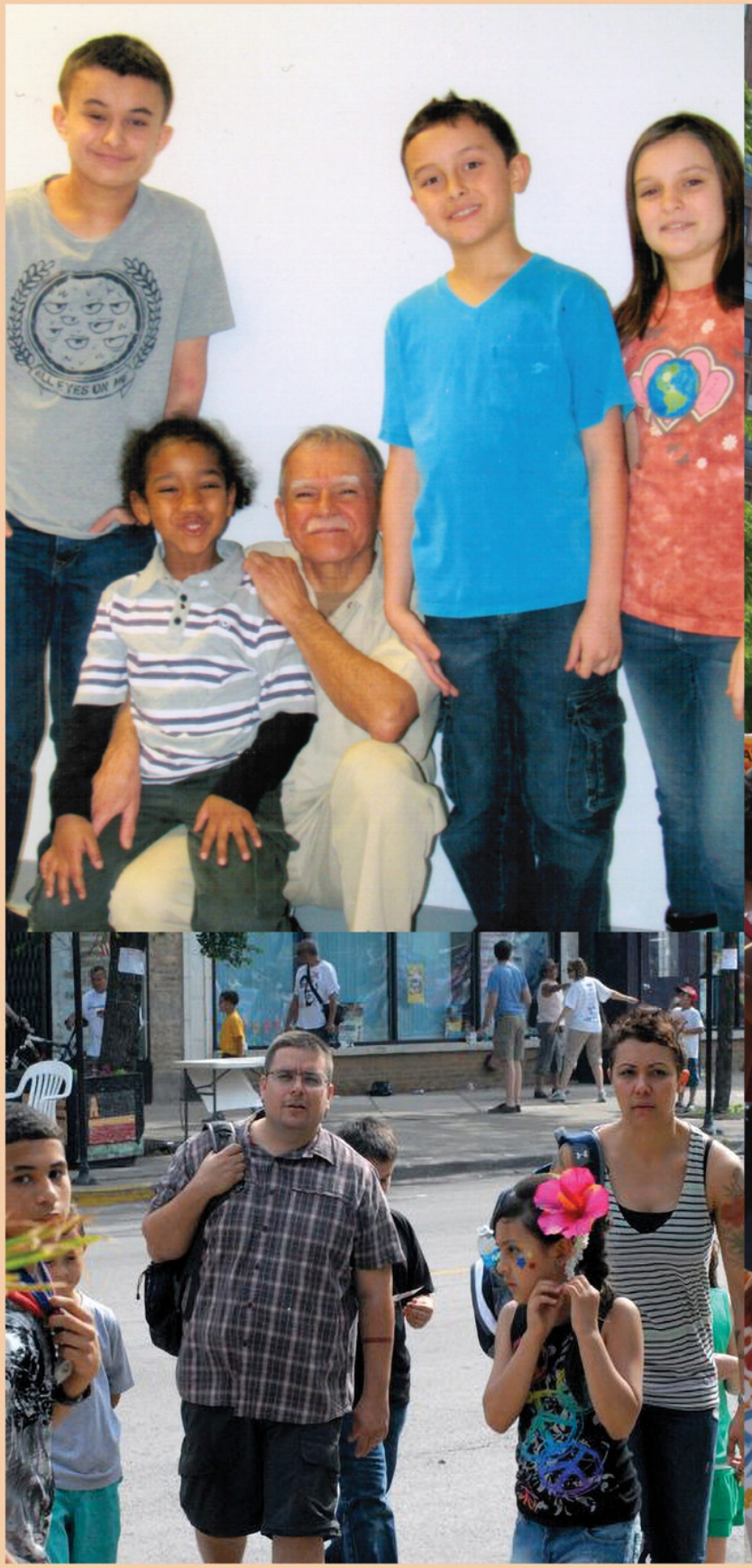
Me and my mother have forever been intertwined in our love for each other. As a young child, I drove her a little nuts, not fully comprehending my sensory processing disorder, and making sure my parents always knew when I was uncomfortable or didn't like something. She ensured that I was met with compassion and resource, never shunning or punishing me for my differences, which became more and more evident. I was afforded the ability to be a funky kid who had his preferences and was a touch different than the other kids. She empowered me in this identity, often suggesting I paint my nails, dress funkier, and express myself more, things which inevitably stuck.

Through the complexity and volatility of adolescence, I always knew Mami loved me, and I loved her; there was never a doubt. In the darker moments of these years where—amidst the vortex of hormones all young people navigate—I began to struggle with chronic depression and generalized anxiety. Mami toed the line of adolescent mental health advocacy effectively, a difficult battle for most parents. As strict as she could be, and as much as she urged my caution and made me reconcile with consequence, Mami never robbed me of my autonomy as a young person.

In these final moments I share with her, I reflect on the wonderful childhood her and my father provided me. I think of thematic cakes, dinosaur toys, overly expensive clothing that was popular at the time, gothic jewelry ordered from suspicious websites, tv shows which I was not old enough to be watching, ice cream sundaes, canned corned beef and rice, movie and dinner nights, and love in its many, at times difficult to identify, forms.

The most incredible part of my mother is that just as she imbued me with all this love and intention, she did the same in every other facet of her life: her work, her community, my father, my siblings, and our family. My mother is truly an inspiration, and cannot be sufficiently described within a short passage.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales





"We Can Achieve Anything!"

"Michelle instilled a sense of moral justice and political awareness into my siblings and I"

Tim Greene



Michelle has been the best mother that I could have asked for, and I would not be the man that I am today without her profound influence on my life.

For the first ten years of my life, I lived with my biological mom in abhorrent conditions with adults that did not fully care for me or my sister's wellbeing and, obviously, were not great role models. In 2007, hardly three years after becoming a first-time mother to Xavi, Michelle selflessly agreed to take my sister and myself in as our stepmom alongside my father.

We did not always see eye to eye! Throughout my teenage years and early adulthood I had a horrible problem with authority and did not acclimate well to her many (well meaning) rules and expectations. During this time, Michelle loved and raised me as a mother ought to have, even as I was not entirely conscious of or grateful for it at the time.

Michelle instilled a sense of moral justice and political awareness into my siblings and I, involving us in her political activism via organizations such as the PRCC. This made us more aware of American imperialism and its injustices than our peers, and washed away years of indoctrination for my sister and I. I will forever cherish those memories and sense of community that our time involved with the PRCC provided us.

As I grew into an adult, my perspective on my relationship with Michelle began to shift from viewing her as my stepmom to viewing her as my mother, full stop. Nearly everything that I value and that characterizes me as a responsible adult stems from the lessons, time, and energy that she poured into me during my journey to adulthood. I hope to honor her legacy and all the sacrifices that she made to give me the life that I have by continuing to carry the values and lessons that she passed on to me, and perhaps by passing them on to my own children someday.

I will be forever grateful to the universe for giving me the best mom there was for me. I love Michelle dearly as my mother, and will be forever devastated by her loss.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales













"How do you witness so much injustice, so many disappointments, so many battles—and still wake up believing that change is possible? Michelle did"

Ald. Jessie Fuentes

I first encountered Michelle Morales when I was 16 years old. I was young, still finding my way, still trying to understand who I was and what my purpose might be. Michelle was the Coordinator of the National Boricua Human Rights Network (NBHRN), and I had become excited about the work to bring our political prisoner's home.

At that age, I didn't fully understand the magnitude of what it meant to be in THE movement. I didn't yet understand how much courage, sacrifice, discipline, and hope it takes to dedicate your life to a struggle that may outlive you. But I knew Michelle. Michelle may not know this, but her ability to be unapologetically and authentically herself gave me permission to become more authentically me.

We all know Michelle for her bold swagger, her presence, her voice, and the way she could command a room. But I knew another Michelle, too. I knew Michelle as someone who would stop and take the time to answer a young person's question. The Michelle who would mentor young organizers and remind us that our work did not begin with us. She rooted us in history. She taught us to understand where we came from so that we could imagine where we were going. She dared us to dream. And, perhaps more importantly, she dared us to be brave enough to organize for those dreams.

During my time with NBHRN, I often looked at Michelle and wondered: How does someone stay in movement for so long and still hold onto hope? How do you witness so much injustice, so many disappointments, so many battles—and still wake up believing that change is possible? Michelle did.

She reminded us that our struggle is a struggle in perpetuity. That we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. That the work we do today may not be finished in our lifetime, but that it still matters. That every conversation, every meeting, every young person we inspire, every neighbor we stand beside, every act of courage creates a ripple that reaches farther than we may ever know. I understand that differently now.

I live my life and my leadership carrying pieces of Michelle with me. I find myself channeling my inner Michelle - her courage, her conviction, her authenticity, her insistence that we keep going. Michelle will probably never take credit for this. She never would. But the truth is that I am the leader and organizer I am today because I had the extraordinary privilege of watching Michelle Morales lead.

I watched her organize in our community. I watched her fight for people who needed someone to stand beside them. I watched her nurture young people and make them believe that their voices mattered. And I watched her build a life and a family while still giving so much of herself to the movement. That taught me something, too.

Leadership isn't only what happens at a microphone, in a meeting, or at a protest. It is how we show up for people. It is how we love. It is how we raise our children. It is how we make room for the next generation. It is how we leave people stronger, braver, and more hopeful than we found them. Michelle has done that for me. And I know she has done it for so many others.

If my life has become a continuation of the work Michelle poured into our community, then I hope she knows that her work lives on through me. It lives on through every young organizer she encouraged, every person she inspired, every fight she helped carry, and every person who learned from her that we have an obligation to leave this world better than we found it. Michelle, you gave so much of yourself to us.

You taught us to be bold. To be rooted. To be unapologetically ourselves. To fight. To dream. To organize. And above all, to never surrender our hope. I am who I am in no small part because you were who you were. For that, I will spend the rest of my life carrying your lessons forward. Michelle Morales is not simply my friend, my mentor, or my fellow organizer.

She is my Shero. And I am forever grateful that, at 16 years old, I had the privilege of finding her.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales





"...the community you have stood with for so many years now stands firmly with you"

Marvin Garcia

For decades, you have given so much of yourself to our community as an educator, organizer, mentor, leader, and *compañera*.

Your commitment to Puerto Rico, our young people, and the struggle for justice has touched countless lives.

I have had the privilege of working alongside you throughout much of that journey, from when you joined Albizu Campos High School just out of college to 25 years later, serving together on the Northeastern Illinois University Board of Trustees. Throughout those years, I have always admired your intelligence, strength, principles, and unwavering commitment to excellence and community.

From Albizu Campos High School and the Alternative Schools Network to the many movements and organizations you have helped strengthen, your contributions have made a lasting impact. As you face this difficult challenge, I want you to know that the community you have stood with for so many years now stands firmly with you. I send you my love, strength, prayers, and best wishes.

Michelle, you are deeply loved and appreciated. ¡Estamos contigo, compañera!



A Tribute to Michelle Morales



"We Can Achieve Anything!"

"I love you; we will always be together"

Jack Wuest

I'm going to read a beautiful quote from Dr. Zhivago.

You and others this is your soul. This is what you are. This is what you're consciousness is breathed and lived on and enjoy throughout your life – your soul you're immortality and your life in others. You have always been in others and you will remain in others. And what does it matter to you if later on that is called your memory? This will be you – that you that Enters the future and becomes a part of it. however, far back you go in your memory it is always in some External, active manifestation of yourself you come across your identity – in the work of your hands, in your family and other people. You said something about being talented – that it makes one different. Now, that does have something to do with us and talent in the highest and broader sense means talent for life. This is our Resurrection through ourselves, and all that that we do and all the people that we support and they carry us forward and resurrect our lives again as your life is resurrected going forward.

From dust we come to dust we return. From the dust of a colonial Puerto Rico and the great work through Puerto Rican Cultural Center and the coal dust of the Woods Foundation. You live through us as we live through you and others, and we are all resurrected as we work to create a kinder and loving and much fairer world. You've certainly done all that Michelle.



A Tribute to Michelle Morales









"Michelle Morales—My Soul Sister"

Marisol Morales

What can I say about the woman who knows me best? Michelle is fierce, powerful, committed, and beautiful. She is my person. Michelle and I met when we were 19 years old. What began as one of the most transformative experiences of our higher education journeys also created the strongest bond—and the most enduring friendship and sisterhood—of my life.



We learned together, became activists together, organized together, and were even pregnant at the same time. Our boys, Xavi and Diego, have been best friends since they were in utero. We developed our political consciousness side by side, worked together in National Boricua, and discovered our shared love for and commitment to community and *patria*. And, of course, there have been countless times when people have mistaken one of us for the other. I believe the universe connected us intentionally—through our last name, our birth year, our motherland, and the paths we were destined to walk together. Michelle was always meant to be my soul sister.

We have shared so many experiences, adventures, travels, joys, heartbreaks, and ups and downs. But through it all, we have always shown up for one another. Michelle reminds me to honor my boundaries, listens patiently to my wild stories, and arrives with lasagna whenever there is healing to be done. Her love is both tender and practical—the kind of love that feeds your spirit and makes sure you have eaten.

Michelle is one of the most extraordinary people I know. I have always admired and loved her. She is a strong and steady leader, a justice-centered soul, and the best person you could ever have in your corner. It has been a joy to witness her accomplishments, to be her cheerleader as she has been mine, and, more than anything, to walk alongside her through this life. I am profoundly grateful to call her my best friend, to stand in her light, and to know the depth of her love.

I have loved witnessing her love story with Scott; her fierce and tender motherly love for Xavi, Timmy, and Alyssa; and the devotion she brings as the eldest daughter, sister, aunt, and anchor to her parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews. She loves her family with her whole heart, and that love can be felt in everything she does.

Michelle is a force—and easily the fiercest dresser I know. It has been one of the great privileges of my life to watch her evolve from the young woman I met in college into the remarkable woman she is today. She is the strongest person I know, and when she loves you, she loves you deeply—with honesty, loyalty, accountability, and her whole heart. I am so fortunate to be a beneficiary of that love. And let us be clear: Michelle also has some serious boundaries. She will love you deeply, hold you accountable, and drop a motherfucker quickly when necessary. That, too, is part of her magic.

As I give you your flowers, Michelle, I know there are no words big enough to express how much I love you or how many blessings you have brought into my life. Thank you for your friendship, your love, your *consejos*, your accountability, and your unwavering sisterhood.

You are my soul sister, and walking through this life with you has been one of its greatest gifts.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales









"Thank you for being a compañera, amiga, y hermana"

Veronica Crespo Rich

I have had the privilege of knowing Michelle for over 30 years. As the universe would have it, we have remained close ever since our paths first crossed at DePaul University.

We have truly grown up together—from our early days at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center to navigating all the seasons of adulting side by side. Michelle is one of my dearest, most trusted friends, and I feel incredibly grateful to have her in my corner.

Over the years, Michelle has held many roles in her professional life: President, CEO, Vice Chair, Executive Director, Associate Director, Assistant Principal, Teacher, and the list goes on. But anyone who knows Michelle knows her most cherished roles are those of daughter, sister, wife, mother, and friend.



As deeply as she is devoted to her career, her commitment to her family and loved ones always comes first. And that is saying a lot, considering the impressive impact she has made through her political and social activism.

I have witnessed firsthand her unwavering dedication to the freedom of the Puerto Rican political prisoners, the self-determination of Puerto Rico, and the fight against gentrification. Her life's work has been to dismantle systems of oppression and to stand in solidarity with the Puerto Rican community and communities across Chicago. She gives her time, effort, and profound love to her people willingly, and has never expected recognition for her tireless contributions. But she deserves all her flowers!

Michelle, everything you do, you do with all your heart. I know it because I've seen it. Your work ethic is bananas, and your transparency is kind of nuts lol. You are easily one of the most honest persons I have ever met. I've learned so much from your endless resilience and your enduring hope.

Thank you for being ridiculous with me. Thank you for our late-night texts, especially the ones that have me cackling out loud. Thank you for the deep conversations, the bochinche, and the much-needed girl time. Thank you for being a *compañera, amiga, y hermana*. Thank you for sharing your space, your light, and your life with me. I will be forever grateful for our friendship.

I love you.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales



"Your unwavering voice and dedication has been a true guiding light for all those with whom you have crossed paths"

C. Mayra Hernández



Standing side-by-side with you, sharing our stories, our struggles, our triumphs, our passions, motherhood, some amazing memories and the unlimited exchange of *consejos* … our friendship, has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

From the streets of Borikén to the heart of the diaspora here in Chicago, your unwavering voice and dedication has been a true guiding light for all those with whom you have crossed paths.

Your work in the diaspora has always been about more than just remembering where we came from—it has been about active resistance and empowerment; preserving the Puerto Rican culture, defending the community, and ensuring its voices were never silenced. You understood deeply that the fight for liberation is fought on multiple fronts—both on the ground and within the diaspora.

You have also dedicated yourself to ensuring a powerful, uncompromising voice for our youth by giving the next generation the tools, the pride, and the platform to carry the torch forward.

Through the long organizing hours, the community campaigns, and the quiet moments of reflection, your laughter, resilience, and dedication has kept everyone moving forward.

You are more than a friend; we are the family we chose.

The spaces you built will continue to thrive because of your sacrifice, your dedication, and your passion. You have always given a voice to those who may not have had one, and that voice will carry us all.

We will all stand as a living testament to your legacy.

Te amaré siempre.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales



"In all the years I have known Michelle, she has always fiercely led with love, with her whole being."

Laura Ruth Johnson

I am grateful to have known and worked with Michelle for almost three decades and honored to call her my dear friend, *compa, hermana*. Words fail when asked to describe what she means not just to me, but to the broader community of Barrio Borikén/Humboldt Park and the city of Chicago.



The breadth and depth of her work in the areas of alternative education, youth civic engagement, Puerto Rican independence and sovereignty, and social justice philanthropy are exemplary, and reflect the ways her professional trajectory has been deeply shaped and informed by her cultural identity and strongly held personal beliefs and values. In all her roles—from a high school teacher at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School to President of the Woods Fund—she has centered love as an integral part of the struggle for a better and more just society and world.



I first met Michelle in the mid-late 1990s when she was a student at Depaul University. In the 2000s, we worked closely together on the campaign to free Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López Rivera, spending countless hours working informational tables at community events, such as Fiesta Borica and the annual pancake breakfast fundraiser, and traveling to cities across the country to advocate for his excarceration. Michelle was embedded and immersed in all aspects of the work and played an integral role in Oscar's release. It is from this work that I believe in miracles, as we were often told that attaining Oscar's release was an impossible task, and the achievement of such a miracle was due in no small part to Michelle's consistent, uncompromising, and determined leadership.

Anyone who has met and worked with Michelle knows her as a force of nature, who never loses sight of the big picture while being meticulously focused on the details and steps necessary to make things happen. In all the years I have known Michelle, she has always fiercely led with love, with her whole being, exemplifying bell hooks' emphasis on leading with love in order to transform the world. And she is the best hugger I have ever known. Love you, *hermana*. So grateful for these many years of friendship and solidarity.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales











"...You understood the sacrifices of those who came before us, and you were willing to make sacrifices of your own"



Billy and I want to tell you, while we can, how much you mean to us.

Your smile has always felt like a warm summer breeze, gentle enough to make the whole world feel right. But when you stood against injustice, that breeze became a storm. Your voice and passion shook the ground beneath us, moving our collective struggle towards liberation. We have always loved the warmth in you and admired the force of your courage.

We could call you fierce, but the word is too small. You fought tirelessly for the freedom of our prisoners and of our beloved Puerto Rico. You understood the sacrifices of those who came before us, and you were willing to make sacrifices of your own. We watched you in awe.

To us, you are a *Cacica*: a woman who leads with courage, conviction, compassion and badass warrior tattoos! Long before you faced this illness, you had already shown us what it means to be brave.

Thank you for your friendship, your example, and the love you have given so freely. Thank you for supporting *nuestro museo* and being an advocate for Puerto Rican arts and culture. Thank you for reminding us that one person's voice can carry the hopes of so many.

Our grandchildren will know your name, and the stories of your courage will live on in all of us. You have been, and always will be, a heroine to us.

Although our hearts break at the thought of your next journey, we are certain we will see you again. We pray that you feel God's loving embrace and peace, as well as the radiant welcoming light of our ancestors, guardian angels, and loved ones surrounding you. May their presence remind you that you are never alone. We hope you feel, right now, how deeply you are loved and celebrated. You will live forever be in our hearts.

¡Que Viva Puerto Rico y Michelle Libre!
Boricua en la luna y en el cielo, que Dios te bendiga y te acompañe.

Con much amor y gratitud.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales









"We Can Achieve Anything!"

"I am proud to be among the many who have the privilege of calling you a friend."

Mervin Méndez

I'm grateful to have been a witness to your life since you were a student at DePaul in the 90s and to have watched all that you have done since then. You have never sought great rewards or recognition. Your compass has always been your love for humanity.

You have been one of our community's best examples of what it truly means to be a warrior of light—shining a light on the injustices we have been subjected to while creating pathways toward something better.

You have built bridges for people. You have always listened. You have made space for others and helped people see possibilities beyond the circumstances they were given.

Your battle with cancer has been long and difficult. Yet, even in the midst of your illness, you have never stopped working for that better day. You never complain about your health, and I almost wish you would have—because you are my friend, and I love you.

Your love for humanity has always seemed to make even the most difficult things feel smaller.

Your life has been one of great intentionality. You have lived with purpose, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to the belief that we can create something better than the world we were given.

I am so grateful for your friendship and for the privilege of sharing with you in this struggle to become truly free.

And while I believe pride can sometimes be a dangerous thing, I am proud to be among the many who have the privilege of calling you a friend.

Thank you for the example you have given to all of us—young and old. Thank you for the light you have carried, and for the light you have shared with so many of us.

With love and deep gratitude.












National
ricua
Rights Network

"We Can Achieve Anything!"

A Giant Among Us

Michael Rodríguez Muñiz

Michelle Morales is a giant in our struggle. *Indefatigable*. In the nearly thirty years I have known her, she has worked tirelessly to advance Puerto Rico's liberation and secure the freedom of our imprisoned patriots. No task too big nor too small. With the same determination, she delivered speeches, raised funds, organized protests, set up chairs and tables, knocked on doors, hoisted banners, delivered newspapers, picked up trash, wrapped gifts, taught students, and strategized for a free Puerto Rico.



Selfless. Some crave leadership for the recognition and status that it may afford. Not Michelle. There was no desire for the limelight, only opportunities to move us forward. Accordingly, she always assumed roles as needed. Never out of ease or ego. This is how Michelle, at a pivotal moment, became the spokesperson of the National Boricua Human Rights Network.

Steadfast. The struggle is difficult. Victories are rarely easy to secure and never guaranteed. Failure is always a possibility. Given this reality, losing hope is an ever-present temptation. If Michelle ever lost hope, her actions said otherwise. Years piled on, but she refused to abandon Oscar López-Rivera and Carlos Alberto Torres. She kept working for their freedom, even as *compañeras* and *compañeros* came and went. As Lolita Lebrón and Carmen Valentín had before them, they too, she believed, would one day walk free.

Formidable. Michelle embodies strength and courage. Never have I seen her submit to anxiety or fear. Not when saddled with nearly endless responsibilities. Not when asked to address hundreds, if not thousands. Not when awaiting arrest in front of the White House. Not when FBI repression was a real and present danger.

Devoted. Love has always animated Michelle. Love for her people. Love for her community. Love for her comrades. Love for her family. Challenging as it was, she passionately wove these loves together to form her life's brilliant oeuvre of struggle. *Michelle Morales.*

A Tribute to Michelle Morales



"Michelle, Michelle, Michelle. You will always be with us"

Jan Susler

How do you write about someone being prematurely and unthinkably snatched from your midst, when she is the very sort of human being we need more of? One willing to grapple with her identity as a Puerto Rican, embrace who she is, seek out her people so she can invest in the future – teaching, learning, setting an example for both young people and peers? One willing to learn to stand up and speak out – eloquently, adamantly, collectively, and at no small risk – for the human rights and release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners? One willing to instill in her child this love for her people and the beautiful Puerto Rican community she helped create? One daring to adorn her beautiful body with politically meaningful tattoos and dashing outfits and accessories? One whose mere presence lights up a room? Michelle, Michelle, Michelle. You will always be with us.



A Tribute to Michelle Morales













"She leads by example, and her perseverance has inspired many around her"

Ricardo Jiménez

I have spent weeks reflecting on the words to express what Michelle Morales means to me, especially during a pivotal moment in my life when I was returning to work on the campaign for Oscar's Freedom. I had heard of Michelle before, but meeting her in person was different; her words truly reflected her dedication.

As we worked together, I witnessed the commitment and leadership of a new generation of Puerto Ricans. Michelle serves as an exemplary figure for this new generation, consistently demonstrating passion, innovation, and a strong attitude that showcases her leadership qualities. She leads by example, and her perseverance has inspired many around her.

Years later, Michelle Morales welcomed Xavier Morales Greene into the world, and he has been a part of my life ever since. Michelle made sure I met him, and over time, Xavi has become a cherished part of my memories. I admire the humanity he has developed, much like his mother, and I also see him as an example of youth taking on a leadership role in our community. He actively advocates for the freedom of our island, Puerto Rico. The legacy of activism is surely the backbone of his life.

Thank you for sharing your son with me and for giving me unforgettable memories of you both. Thank you for your outstanding contribution to our country's freedom and your unwavering dedication. Love you, Michelle.



A Tribute to Michelle Morales



"She brings her whole self, her full passion, to everything she touches."

Miguel Morales



Michelle Morales has been a longtime friend and comrade. In all the years I have known her, Michelle's passion and dedication to the Chicago Boricua community and to social justice have inspired me.

I met Michelle in undergrad at DePaul University, in José Solís's course on the history of United States colonialism in Puerto Rico. It was in that same classroom that I met another future comrade and lifelong friend, Marisol. The three of us always sat toward the front, leaning into every lecture, and our classmates joked that we must be siblings. None of us knew then that we were at the beginning of a journey that would carry us through the most formative years of our adulthood.

In 1997, we helped form the Committee in Solidarity with José Solís Jordán, with his former students and colleagues, defending him against charges that he had bombed a military recruiting office in Cicero, Illinois. In 1999, I worked alongside Michelle at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, around the same time the National Boricua Human Rights Network was founded to fight for the release of the remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners, Carlos Alberto Torres and Oscar López Rivera, and to demand that the US Navy leave Vieques. Michelle was a significant part of those victories, through years of tireless organizing.

In all of this, Michelle lived out the values we aspired to as students — Puerto Rican self-determination and community building, not as slogans but as daily practice. It showed up in the Pancake Breakfasts and the fundraisers at Sonotech, in marches downtown and in DC, in road trips to Washington, Philadelphia, and New York. And it showed up just as much in the dinners with friends and family, and in the mini cooking competitions with our late friend and comrade Johnny Tirado — because for Michelle, the work and the love are never separate things.

Michelle is courageous. I have watched her challenge herself again and again in the work. She brings her whole self, her full passion, to everything she touches. Michelle, thank you for thirty years of friendship, and for showing me — showing all of us — what it looks like to give your life to your people without ever losing yourself in it. I love you dearly my sister.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales







"What I could not know then was how lasting and expansive her contributions would be"

Michael Hannan



I met Michelle Morales toward the middle of a long-ago summer. I was seated at the front desk of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center when she emerged from the library. She'd been in the science classroom organizing test tubes and wiping down shelves, and now it was time for her to head home. She approached me with her arms stretched at full length supporting at least 30 pounds of biology and chemistry textbooks.

We introduced ourselves, and I asked if I could help her load the books into her car.

No, she said. She'd be alright, and anyhow, she didn't have a car. She would be walking home.
Where was home?
"About a mile."

Within those first few minutes of meeting Michelle Morales, I knew she would pour herself into the work of teaching at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School. What I could not know then was how lasting and expansive her contributions would be.

Michelle brought a keen intellect and a dedication to hard work that turned her vision of politics, education, solidarity, and Puerto Rican liberation to her work at the high school. She challenged students to perform at their highest level, and she did the same with her colleagues. She wouldn't put up with nonsense from students, but she never wrote them off. She knew that teaching is an act of community service and that she would be a teacher who carried the hopes of the students and families in her arms.

It wasn't too many years after she left the high school that I would work with her again at Alternative Schools Network, where she would eventually become the Associate Director, and again she challenged her colleagues to perform. She knew that ASN was founded to serve families and youth by sharing the heavy lifting with our member schools.

Michelle inspires me because she understands the deep responsibility of service. You or I may read the headlines and wish the world were more just. We may complain or rage at the unfairness. But Michelle Morales takes responsibility to bring change, to build futures, and to rally the rest of us to do the same. She knows that progress requires heavy lifting, just as she knew she had to carry those textbooks home, car or no car, to become a great teacher.


CLASS OF 1990-91
ANDRES MOLINA
SELINA NIEVES
JOE SERRANO
GLORIA MORENO
ROBERT SANCHEZ
CATALINA TORRES
GILBERT ROSADO
CHRISTINA MORENO
GEORGE MARTINEZ
YESENIA OQUENDO
LAZARO VELASQUEZ
MARISOL SANTIAGO
CLASS of 19
NTONIO CINTRON
ABION CRUZ
ESUS MARQUEZ
JAN RIVERA
NA SILVA
STEPHANI
ALEX MU
YAZMIN P
JIMMY S
MARCEL T
WASH ROOMS
EXIT
AC/DC

"We Can Achieve Anything!"

"I cannot think of any project or program of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School which does not include Michelle's DNA"

Lourdes Lugo

Solid is the word that comes to my heart and mind when I think of Michelle. We have never been "chummy," but I have felt her love, care and solidarity throughout our friendship and camaraderie.

We met in the "fire midst" of building La Casita de Don Pedro y Doña Lolita on Division St. She entered with a big smile when we were dealing with the cement machine that had broken down and we had to hand pour the base of the entrance sidewalk to La Casita. After that we forged bonds based on the real struggle to stop gentrification, free the prisoners, secure education for our youth and build bridges that continue to help our community to cross difficult life events and come out with real triumphs to this day.

I cannot think of any project or program of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School which does not include Michelle's DNA. Sometimes very publicly but more than once very much behind the scenes. For that we are all humbled and grateful for Michelle.

Lastly, when I left Chicago to New Orleans Michelle was my most frequent visitor. We continued to discover and appreciate our growth. Hands down I became a better person in some ways because of the challenges and love Michelle has always offered. For this Gracias Michelle,

Te Amo.





A Tribute to Michelle Morales



"Today the prisoners are free and the Navy is gone, and Michelle could take some tiny credit for both."

Michael Staudenmaier

I first met Michelle in either 1996 or 1997, whenever she started working at Albizu Campos High School. From the very start, it was clear that she was a dynamic and motivated leader. I remember thinking early on that she was going to be principal one day, and while that didn't happen, she did end up on the Board of Directors, not only for PACHS but for NEIU as well, and she didn't run a school but has run multiple other nonprofits, including the Woods Fund. I wasn't wrong to see great things – and leadership in particular – in her future.

Working at the High School in the 90s also meant committing to a LOT of activist work off the clock, and Michelle threw herself into support for the political prisoners, fighting against the Navy in Vieques, and so much more. I remember pancake breakfast fundraisers, overnight bus rides to DC and New York for demonstrations, not to mention several days spent observing the International Tribunal in Vieques in 2000. Today the prisoners are free and the Navy is gone, and Michelle could take some tiny credit for both, though I know of course that she won't because she has always understood that social change is a collective endeavor. Michelle has also, as these photos make clear, always known how to have fun, whether dressing up at Halloween, being part of the Desfile del Pueblo each summer, or relaxing with friends.





Michelle has supported me personally in many ways: when I was about to be hired at the Alternative Schools Network, she coached me on how to negotiate my salary and benefits – something I had NEVER done before. Her son Xavi was born a year before my oldest kid, Sofia, and she offered parenting advice whenever I asked. When Anne and I bought our house in 2020, she and Scott pointed us toward a good attorney. Most recently, this spring, Michelle agreed to participate in one of the very first events for my new book; our discussion was equal parts fond reminiscence and intellectual dialogue, and I will be forever grateful we got to spend that time together.

Michelle: Cancer is fucking evil, but it can never erase all that you have done to make the world a better place, or all the ways you have been my friend and comrade. I love you so much!

A Tribute to Michelle Morales









"Gracias, querida Michelle, por todas las luchas, en especial por la excarcelación de mi padre, Oscar López Rivera."

Clarisa López Ramos

Hay mujeres que con su ejemplo y actuar dejan una huella tan profunda que uno quisiera, no sólo que fueran eternas, sino que el tiempo no pasara por su cuerpo y que gozaran de una salud impecable. Lamentablemente eso no es posible. Sin embargo, nada puede evitar el respeto, amor, la solidaridad, admiración y el orgullo de haber compartido con Michelle un espacito de su labor comunitaria.

Su voz, mirada, humildad, inteligencia y entusiasmo te inspiraban, comprometian y cuando menos te contagiaban.

Gracias, querida Michelle, por todas las luchas, en especial por la excarcelación de mi padre, Oscar López Rivera. Agradecida por tus enseñanzas y por haberme permitido aprender que sí se puede cuando se lucha por el bien colectivo y se comprende que ser un lídereza es un sentimiento de la vida y no un medio de vida.

En lucha y resistencia.



A Tribute to Michelle Morales









"I really appreciate how you have always been conscious of not only being Puerto Rican, but also a Puerto Rican woman."

Margaret and Melinda Power

Michelle,

I recently came across a photo of you and me on a stage behind a banner of International Women's Day. (I will see if I can find it again.) It reminded me of all the many times I have heard you speak on issues dear to your heart and to mine. You always combined sincerity, passion, knowledge, and warmth. In other words, you were always convincing and moving.



I also remember the time I interviewed you for the article about nationalism in Chicago and you told me your life story. I loved hearing about it and learning about you.

Since I have known you, you have always been a person I respect. and trust. I am not talking about all the work you have done, the committees you have led, the contributions you have made. But of course I appreciate all of that.

And of course because of you I know Scott, who I think is wonderful and Xavier, who is the best. You all deserve each other.

Lots of love.
Margaret

Dear Michelle,

You are really a source of inspiration! From the moment I met you, I thought how much you contribute to everything you do. Of course, your work in support of the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners made such a difference. Then, your work in the schools and the ASN has made a big difference, especially because of your ability to bring into your work your understanding and commitment to helping Puerto Rican and Latino students. And, I really appreciate how you have always been conscious of not only being Puerto Rican, but also a Puerto Rican woman. I remember one time we spoke about your growing up in Indianapolis, which was not a center for Puerto Ricans or even Latinos when you grew up there.

It's always a pleasure to see you. In recent years, your honesty and frankness about what you have been going through is both sad to hear, and also so moving. And you just keep going!

And, knowing what a great guy Scott is and getting to know Xavier a little are extra bonuses.

Your friend, Melinda

A Tribute to Michelle Morales















"She personifies solidarity because she knows Puerto Rican and Palestinian national liberation are inextricably linked."

Hatem Abudayyeh, Executive Director, Arab American Action Network

Michelle has always been our shining star.

I am older than her, but I do not remember a moment in my organizing career when Michelle Morales was not accomplishing amazing feats as the absolute embodiment of dedicated sacrifice to a cause. Organizing with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and the National Boricua Human Rights Network (NBHRN), Michelle brought her *independentista* bonafides to Humboldt Park, helping lead some of her people's most important U.S. campaigns.



I remember vividly when Michelle and her comrades stopped the U.S. Navy's bombing of Vieques, a massive victory in the anticolonial struggle for Puerto Rico. She was also in the leadership of the fight to free Puerto Rican political prisoners—an issue dear to my heart because my people, the Palestinians, also have internationally-renowned political prisoners fighting to be free.

With Michelle, we celebrated the releases of independence legends Carlos Alberto Torres and Oscar López Rivera. Being invited to welcome them home to Paseo Boricua remains among the most emotional moments of my life.

Michelle's work is a guiding light. NBHRN is the principal inspiration for our own political prisoner advocacy; Michelle teaches us how to fight, how to win, and how to celebrate with our people.

When she transitioned to philanthropy as President of Woods Fund Chicago, which supports the Arab American Action Network (AAAN), I was excited to work with her again. Because Michelle knows community organizing intimately, she knows how to support us best. Under her leadership, Woods funded vital Black and brown organizations to organize for racial justice and police accountability following the George Floyd Uprising.

Over decades, whenever I call Michelle to speak at a protest, attend a meeting, or make a call, she never balks. She stands and marches with us, defends us through post-9/11 repression and Muslim Bans, and invites us to march at the Puerto Rican People's Day Parade. She personifies solidarity because she knows Puerto Rican and Palestinian national liberation are inextricably linked.

We express unconditional love and support for our shining star, Michelle Morales, and for her family and community!

A Tribute to Michelle Morales















"Mataréis el dios del miedo; solo entonces seréis libres"

Luis Alejandro Molina

People who met Michelle and saw the tattoo across her back bearing those words would often tell me over the years how deeply it impacted them. Attributed to Cacique Urayoán during the Taíno Rebellion of 1511, the phrase translates to: "Kill the god of fear; only then will you be free." Michelle lived her life—and later led the campaign to free our political prisoners—by that creed.



At the point in the campaign to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners when she got that tattoo, we had designed a collector's poster (view a large version at bit.ly/matareis-miedo), deliberately selecting only photographs from demonstrations led or supported by the National Boricua Human Rights Network (NBHRN). Always calm—yet never afraid of struggle, principled criticism, or, when merited, confrontation—Michelle was part of the generation that took up the mantle of leadership following the decades of intense repression and resistance of the 1970s and 1980s.

I first met Michelle in late 1997 or early 1998, alongside Marisol and Miguel Morales (no relation), as part of the Dr. José Solís Jordán Defense Committee—a collective of activists and students formed at DePaul University, where Solís Jordán taught. The three students quickly became an indispensable core of his defense efforts. At that time, the campaign in the United States was spearheaded by the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, which collaborated with numerous organizations in Puerto Rico, most notably Ofensiva '92, led by the brilliant sociologist, attorney, and author Dr. Luis Nieves Falcón.
Following Dr. Solís's unjust conviction and sentencing in 1999—and the presidential clemency and release of eleven political prisoners in September of that same year—the Solís Defense Committee joined the newly founded National Boricua Human Rights Network. Michelle quickly established herself as an anchor of the Network. She played a vital role in educating and mobilizing around national campaigns—such as the struggle to expel the U.S. Navy from Vieques, Puerto Rico—as well as urgent local fights against gentrification and for healthcare access in Chicago's Humboldt Park, the historic heart of the Puerto Rican community.

Parallel to her activism, Michelle dedicated herself to emancipatory education. She expanded her impact across the city, first as Assistant Principal at the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School, and subsequently in a citywide capacity as Associate Director of the Alternative Schools Network, championing community-based high schools and educational equity initiatives.

As the campaign to free the remaining political prisoners expanded, Michelle assumed greater leadership. She accepted the role of treasurer and soon stepped forward to co-coordinate an extensive international campaign advocating for their release. The tireless work of Michelle and countless allied organizations, individuals and our community in the US and in Puerto Rico bore historic fruit in July 2010 with the freedom of Carlos Alberto Torres after thirty years of unjust imprisonment.

Continued on page 59

A Tribute to Michelle Morales



Commemoration of April 4th, 1980 arrests of Puerto Rican political prisoners in Evanston, IL, circa April 2007

Top row, from left to right: Rubén Gerena, Angel Fuentes, Marvin García, Xavier Luis Burgos, Jose Elías Torres and Nora Vargas Acosta, Omar Sierra, Elma Beatriz Rosado, José Elías López, Michelle Virella, Michael Reyes, Juanita García Avilés, Matthew Rodríguez, Janeida Rivera, Laura Ruth Johnson, Graciano Matos Jr, Jodene Velázquez, Michelle Morales, William Ramírez, Luis Alejandro Molina, Michael Rodríguez Muñiz, Farrique Pesquera, bottom row: Laurencio Gerena, Johnny Tirado, Gabriela Reyes, unknown, Miguel Morales, José Peréz, Emilio Rodríguez, Pedro Adorno Irizarry, Luis Díaz y Yalizee

Michelle continued to broaden her civic leadership, earning an appointment to the Chicago Board of Education and serving as a co-chair of Mayor Brandon Johnson's transition team. She contributed significantly to higher education governance as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees at Northeastern Illinois University and as an advisory committee member for the Latin American and Latino Studies Program at her alma mater, DePaul University.

Even as she ascended in the progressive civic community, she insisted on remaining informed of the progress and setbacks of the campaign to free Oscar López Rivera, asking to meet with me over dinner every two-three weeks or as our mutual schedules allowed.

Called together by Jan Susler, who as Oscar's lawyer, has just received the news, José E. López, Clarisa López Ramos and myself in person, we received the news on January 17, 2017 (Several days before Trump took office) that Oscar was being released. We immediately called Luis V. Gutiérrez, Melissa Mark Viverto, Michael Nieves and Carmen Yulin Cruz. I then called the campaign area coordinators and Michelle.

Diagnosed with breast cancer in April 2021, Michelle made the extraordinarily brave decision to share her health journey publicly on social media and underwent a double mastectomy. Even in the face of profound personal adversity, she never wavered in her concept of service, leading the Illinois chapter of the Mikva Challenge to empower middle and high school youth to become civically engaged leaders in their communities.







Today, she serves as President of Woods Fund Chicago, where she has guided the foundation in centering racial justice internally and externally, embedding trust-based philanthropy into its grantmaking practices, and expanding vital support for grassroots community organizing and advocacy.

Michelle, we love you across every phase of our shared struggle, political maturation, and personal growth. We salute your extraordinary contributions as a Puerto Rican woman, as a daughter of the Diaspora, as an organizer, and as an leader.

Above all, we honor the indelible example you continue to set for the Puerto Rican independence movement on its continuous journey toward self-determination.

Michelle 2010 YouTube PSA on the Campaign for Carlos Alberto Torres Freedom
https://bit.ly/CAT-PSA-Michelle

Michelle on "Division & Western" speaking on community vision (6:13)
https://bit.ly/div-western

A Tribute to Michelle Morales











"We Can Achieve Anything!"

"She is calm; she is strong; she is courageous; she is fierce; she is caring; she is loving; and she is thoughtful"

José E. López

As I reflect on Michelle Morales and her impact on our beloved community, there is one word that immediately comes to the fore—it is the word GRACE.

At every turn in her life, ever since I met her decades ago, she has confronted life's many trials and tribulations with a GRACE-FUL dignity. She is calm; she is strong; she is courageous; she is fierce; she is caring; she is loving; and she is thoughtful. And, like her Puerto Rican ancestors, she is incredibly resilient. These are the virtues which Michelle has always exhibited as an activist, as an educator, as a leader, as a daughter, as a sister, as a partner, as a mother, and as a friend; always with kindly affection and without hypocrisy. This is what GRACE is.

As a leader in so many efforts in building a community of struggle and hope, whether in the fight for political prisoners, the demand to bring peace to the island of Vieques, the campaign against gentrification, the sanctuary efforts for our undocumented neighbors, or the programs to engage our youth in civic engagement, she has demonstrated a contagious enthusiasm in which she centers the deliberations of those most impacted by oppressive conditions.



Without a doubt, everyone who has ever met Michelle immediately understands that she is the embodiment of amazing GRACE. She is truly our very own Puerto Rican treasure.

In honor of her caring legacy, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center will establish the MICHELLE MORALES GRACE BUILDER SCHOLARSHIP for a graduating Puerto Rican student from the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School who exhibits her amazing virtues of GRACE.

APPENDIX OF E-MAIL WELL-WISHERS

The following messages were received in response to the Commmunity Call for Solidarity

JASON RODRÍGUEZ, PRCC

OUR BELOVED COMPAÑERA AND SISTER IN STRUGGLE, MICHELLE MORALES:

I pray that God's most precious blessings of love, strength, comfort, peace, and all that is good overwhelm you beyond any other disruption that is not of HIM. In Jesus' Mighty Name.

SANDRA CARTAGENA, COMMUNITY

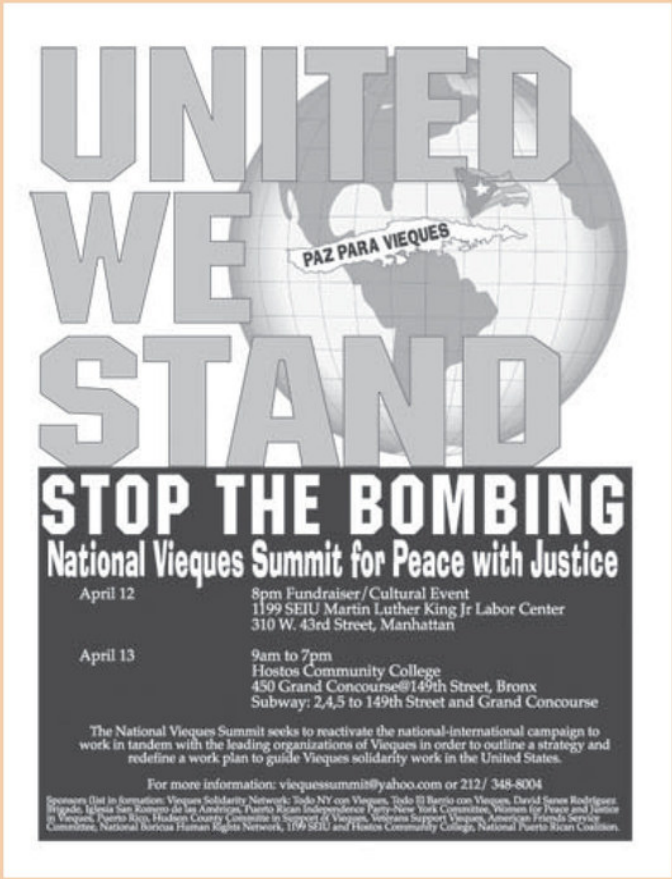
You have always been an inspiration and role model to me. I look up to you for your dedication to our community and our people. Miss seeing your smile. Sending you warm hugs.

ADA LÓPEZ, PUERTO RICAN AGENDA

Our paths have crossed through similar journeys of service to our community. I don't know whether you will remember me, but I remember you and the important work you have carried forward throughout the years.

I know your work has been transformational. Through your leadership, commitment, and generous spirit, you have created a space and opportunities for so many people to grow, lead, and make a difference. You have carried out the kind of foundational work often carried out quietly, beyond public view, yet deeply felt throughout our communities... *aquí y allá.*

Your life and work have made—and continue to make—our community and the world a better place. Your influence lives in the opportunities you have created, the leaders you have encouraged, and the many lives you continue to touch.



I was deeply moved to learn of the health challenges you are facing. Please know that you are held in my prayers, where our deepest hopes are transformed. May you be sustained by the love of our community and blessed with strength and moments of peace.

Estamos contigo, Michelle.

MIGUEL LUCIANO, NEW YORK

So sorry to hear of Michelle's health struggles. Sending her so much love and eternal appreciation for all the love she's given to our community. She's the very best of us, Chicago, Puerto Rico and all of us.

JUANITA IRIZARRY

Please share my love with Michelle. A big virtual hug is sent her way, and I will keep her lifted in prayer.

MARISA ALICEA, DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

Thank you for your call to be with Michelle in prayer and to surround her with love and light and good energy.

Words can't express my love and respect for Michelle. I have known her since she was a student at DePaul. She was a force of nature and a warrior of justice then as she is now. I hold her in my heart, I hold her in light and in prayer.

CHRISTIAN DIAZ

Michelle, Chicago would not be the same without you. Thank you for your voice, your brilliance, your fashion! Can't wait to see you soon. You are loved.

ANN PETERSON KEMP, PRCC BOARD

I'm sending you best wishes, love and peace.

Thank you for being such an inspiration and strong role model in my work with the PRCC. I'm thinking especially of the Street Academy with high school students when I was getting started with the PRCC. You were welcoming and gracious with your time and knowledge on those occasions when we chatted. You helped me see what was really important and offered suggestions for changing course when need-

ed. Your help meant a great deal to me at the time and has proven useful over the years. It has been wonderful to follow your growing leadership and impact on both scholarship and community life. I'm grateful for the gifts you've showered on the world as well as the ways you helped and inspired me individually.

ELDA SANTIAGO & NORBERTO GONZÁLEZ CLAUDIO, PUERTO RICO

Queremos expresar a Michelle nuestra admiración por su historial de vida en defensa de nuestra patria, por su liderazgo como compañera de lucha en todos los frentes en que ha estado y con gran valentía ha enfrentado.

Así mismo le deseamos el triunfo sobre la condición que le afecta hoy día. Que su fuerza interior la levante y sus males físicos desaparezcan. Nuestro aprecio, solidaridad y abrazos.

Pa'lante siempre pa'lante.

SHARON BUSH, WOODS FUND

Hello, I saw the community call for Michelle in *La Voz del Paseo Boricua* on social media shared by several friends. I have known her since her time at Mikva Challenge when I was on the board, and now as a colleague and peer during her time at Woods Fund Chicago. Her leadership and belief in the strength of people power is unmatched. Her strength, resilience, and resistance leave me speechless, especially now. We have done great work together and I am proud that she calls me a friend. I love her dearly and am praying fiercely for her peace and comfort and that she feels the love of the world wrapped around her. She is a gift to Chicago and I imagine that those in your diaspora have felt her profound love for her people.



ANDREA HART, DURHAM, NC

Michelle, I love you. I'm praying over you and your family and over Chicago and all the lives you have left such an incredible mark on. You have truly been such an inspiration to me when trying to lead and live with values, love, style and the people at the center. I remember when City Bureau was wanting to expand its board and how given your legacy fighting for the Puerto Rican community and then the work you were doing with young people and had always done was so essential to me. You got things, things that others would dismiss or look at crazy. You made paths for so many of us to fight and create. I'll never forget the wonderful Christmas party at your house the last holiday season in the before COVID times. THE FOOD. The conversations. The warmth. How much of that was needed to shore up strength for all of us and remind us why joy is also essential fuel.

I love you. Thank you isn't enough and it will never be. You are one of one.

YVETTE RODRIGUEZ

Thank you for your example of strength, conviction, love and humility. I am so grateful that our lives crossed paths. I thank you for generosity towards my family throughout the years. We love you deeply.

NANCY KURSHAN, OAKLAND

You have been an inspiration to me for decades. You were incredible as a young woman yet kept evolving into an even more amazing mature woman. Whether on the board of the Puerto Rican High School or the campaign to free the political prisoners and more, your spirits and smarts were essential. And now from afar I continue to feel your strength, your beauty and your brilliance. With profound admiration.

KETTY MERCEDES BURGOS, COMMUNITY

On weekday workings as I rushed my first-born to a lottery-based (outside of the) neighborhood school, I'd catch you calmly and confidently walking into Albizu Campos H.S., steps away from where we lived. I knew there was something special brewing inside those walls every time you walked into that building. There's always been this cool aura surrounding Michelle, you stand tall and don't shrug. Cancer f^*d around and found out that a woman of your caliber doesn't fold. Sending warmth, healing and divine guidance down your trekked path.

MARISA ALICEA, DEPAUL

From Kenya, to Ireland, to Puerto Rico and from other parts of the world, I have asked friends and colleagues who are spiritual leaders of different faiths to offer prayers and to send light and love to Michelle.

Praying for her are individuals from across the globe that I have worked with and who are now my friends. I have lit a candle for her.

Holding Michelle and her family in my heart.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales

BECKY BELCORE, HANA

My name is Becky Belcore, and I am a Korean American who has been living in Chicago for about 30 years. I first met Michelle when I was doing some consulting work and had the great privilege to learn about the Free Oscar López campaign she was co-leading. I am a board member of the HANA Center, and we honored Michelle and the Woods Fund at one of our recent galas. Here is my message to her:

Dear Michelle, you are such an amazing organizer, fierce advocate and brilliant leader. You are a role model for so many women of color and other folks across all communities, and we appreciate your passion, commitment, and vision. We love you and send you healing energy and strength. Please know the Korean and Asian American community is with you! Thanks.

SHAWN HEALY, PHD

It was a great honor and privilege to get to know you during your tenure as leader of the Mikva Challenge. I admired your steadfast belief in the power of young people to make our city, state, and country a more just and inclusive democracy. Know that your legacy at Mikva and in all of your personal and professional pursuits continues to burn brightly, and that this flame will never be extinguished. Wishing you peace and comfort during these autumn days. In friendship and admiration.

SONIA MATHEW

I am so grateful for your leadership and mentorship over the years. I have admired your warrior spirit, courage and advocacy—both on a professional level and a personal level. While we have not had as much time together as of late, please know that I have deep admiration, respect and love for you. Thank you for always fighting for our communities, your leadership in our City and support of our young people, and your faith and belief in me. And all done with incredible style and the best heart.

I am thankful to be in community with you and I am sending love to you and your family.



NOZOMI IKUTA

Thank you so much for your courage and leadership through all these years. You helped us believe—and prove—that we could do the impossible—free the prisoners, Carlos, and Oscar, stop the bombing, and get the Navy out of Vieques. I doubt that most of my Christian colleagues at the UCC believed that we would succeed at any of them, but we succeeded at all of them. It was the mostly secular members of the NBHRN who lived out the faith that matters—in actual practice.

My heart is so heavy about your long and painful struggle with cancer. I keep hoping that it was a bad dream and that it will all just go away. But it has gone on and on.

I meant to send you Irma's writing about cancer, years ago. I can't remember if I did. But Irma was such a source of encouragement to my Aunt Alice. Irma's name was constantly on her lips.

Of course, despite her words, Irma did eventually succumb to cancer. Mortality does come for us all. But I thought you might find some encouragement in her words, as well as Oscar's.

Please know of my deepest gratitude for all you have done and are. Sending prayers of comfort, love, and healing. Love, resurrection, and ganbarō!

MYRA SALGADO

Michelle, as I write this I honestly don't know how to find the words.

I met you when I was about 19 or 20 years old, and somehow all these years later I am still trying to figure out how to put into words what you have meant to me.

You have always been one of those people who could walk into a room and make an impression without ever needing to demand anyone's attention. You were so incredibly smart, but never made people feel small. You were direct, sometimes wonderfully so, but there was always such kindness underneath it. And you had this way of making people feel like they mattered.

I have watched and admired the way you have given so much of yourself to our community, to Puerto Rico, to the people and struggles you believed in, and to the generations of young people who were lucky enough to cross your path. You have spent so much of your life fighting for other people, building things, teaching, organizing, encouraging, and showing up.

But when I think of you, I don't only think about all of those things.

I think about Michelle.

The young woman I met when I was young

myself. The friend and comrade who left an impression on me that stayed all these years. The person whose intelligence, beauty, strength, humor, honesty, and kindness I have never forgotten.

I wish I had a better way of saying how grateful I am that our paths crossed.

I don't want this message to be about saying goodbye. I just want you to know, while you are here, that you have been loved, respected, admired, and remembered by so many people, and I am one of them.

You have given so much to so many of us and I hope you can feel some of that love coming back to you now. With all my love and solidarity.

MARISEL VIERA, AUTHOR

I was so sorry to learn about your health struggles. I haven't known you very long or even very well since we only met recently. But I was taken by the twinkle in your eye and your humor as you answered my questions for *The Girls from Humboldt Park*. I sincerely hope that you will come out on the other side into the sunshine where your people who love you so much will be waiting for you. And I hope that we'll be able to talk again soon. In the meantime, if there is something I could do for you, please let me know. *Un fuerte abrazo*.

MARIE SNYDER

"None of us are free but some of us are brave" - Jamila Woods

The work towards liberation is brutal and unforgiving—a dance between kindness and rage, compassion and dogged advocacy. It is the most fulfilling and deeply human commitment we can make.

The work towards liberation leaves imprints, and if we are lucky, the imprints bear our name.

The work towards liberation requires us to live several lives within our arc of time. I think about the many lives of Michelle when we first met. A professional rooted in education and the dream of the freedom of Oscar; a mother and auntie who brought the children around because why would you not bring the children around; a friend and self-proclaimed nerd who made no judgments about playing Dungeons & Dragons during our lunch break. I think about how we might have just one life, how few people do as much as Michelle does in hers. I think about the measure of time, how much grief I hold for the future, that maybe grief is at its best when communal.

The work towards liberation is a celebration of our collective. What a gift to have shared some of this time, some of these memories with Michelle. With love.

SHARON ALVARADO

Michelle, we love you so much. You impacted many lives at Mikva Challenge, including mine that little high schooler who came in shy ready to join THC. You showed me what a badass women with a badass style and heels can do and be the bosslady.

You are the definition of strength & power. The support I got from you and the team when I was diagnosed with cancer will be something I will never forget. You are a warrior, a fighter, and a bad ass woman—don't forget it.

LOVE YOU SO MUCH!! Keeping the prayers & good wishes up.

DENISE CASTILLO DELL ISOLA

You have been an inspiration for me since early on in my philanthropy career. The pas-



sion of your convictions and your commitment to racial justice and equity, and fighting for smaller organizations and people working on the ground day in and day out to ensure safe and thriving communities in the face of the consistently challenging environment. How you show up at Woods Fund and all the different tables where you sit demonstrate true leadership. I love running into you with your beautiful smile and big and generous heart. I know many of us wish we could have alleviated the pain you have endured. I am holding you in my heart and continue to pray and send healing vibes.

HARRY BACKLUND

Please send Michelle Morales big gratitude and good wishes from me, and from the team at City Bureau. Michelle was a board member at City Bureau during some pivotal and complex start up years, and her generosity, experience, and moral clarity made a huge impact. On a personal level I learned so much from her approach to education and parenting. Wishing her strength and a world of love.

A Tribute to Michelle Morales



MICHELLE SPEAKING AT THE CONSUELO LEE CORRETJER DAY CARE CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, CIRCA 2023