

## **Andy Palacio – some reflections**

### **By Dr. Joseph Palacio**

In the past few days we have heard much about Andy Palacio, the icon. I would like to share a few words about Andy Palacio as the product of the Garifuna community of Barranco and the larger emerging nation of Belize.

The questions I am raising include – what was the community setting that gave birth to such a great person? What were some of the incubating factors that nourished the artistic talents of Andy? How did his immediate family – mother, father, and assorted relatives – give form to the potential in the child Andy Palacio so that he could climb to the highest pinnacle of world artistic achievement? Can his home community continue to produce geniuses? Finally what lessons did he pass on to the Garifuna community; and, indeed, the world at large?

The family tree of Andy Palacio endowed him with the seed that would grow as a baby and slowly develop the gift with which he was born. Let me mention some of the family surnames of his ancestors. They include from the father's side the Palacio, Cesario (or Antonio), and Zuniga; from his mother's side Avilez and Contreras.

Around the time when Andy was born in 1960 his home village was passing through probably the last phase of an economic boom generated by farming and fishing. His father excelled in these two ways of earning a livelihood. More especially Ruben, his father, was a man of the sea. He carved and repaired his own dories and produced his fishing gear, while being an expert on navigation and the coastline from Punta Gorda to Livingston.

In day and night and under all kinds of weather conditions, Ruben was able to travel wherever he wanted to go and come back home safely. Ruben took along young Andy with him on his fishing and other sea-faring trips. From such experiences in his early formative years, Andy developed a great love and adoration for his father. He learned to appreciate the bounty of the sea and coastline. Furthermore, he acquired much self-confidence and a determination to hold his own whether in good or bad weather. I would add that he also learned to appreciate music and singing for his father was a walking collection of songs in Garifuna, English, Spanish, and Latin. From his mother, the anchor who held the family together, he received the highest form of love and respect for the immediate and extended family, which included the

whole village. During these early years, therefore, Andy acquired his abiding sense of rootedness in people and things Garifuna.

What was the cultural environment in Barranco that influenced Ruben Palacio and, which he in turn, passed on to young Andy? Music, singing, and dancing formed a continuous sound track within the village. Almost everyone could create songs and then popularize them during the several festivities taking place in the annual calendar. One of the main instigators had been S.B. Daniels, the village schoolmaster who taught music as seriously as he did writing, reading, and arithmetic. All of Daniels' students were introduced to the best of music at that time available in the colony of British Honduras. And Ruben passed this treasure to his son Andy.

Can the home village continue to produce geniuses like Andy? In my usual sense of optimism, my answer is yes. Of course, the economic life of the village has declined very much since the 1960s. But there still remains among the members of the community a vibrant musical tradition that needs to be studied extensively and revitalized. Andy himself was doing exactly this kind of revival as seen in the global success of Watina. In Watina Andy was integrating traditional Garifuna music into contemporary form. A continuation of this exercise would have been his next concerted effort, as he continued to re-discover what had been his daily nourishment in the village.

Having been incubated in that very supportive cultural environment of Barranco, Andy's short life has been a bundle of lessons for the Garifuna community, our beloved Jewel; and indeed the world at large. They include hard work, perseverance, perfectionism, and carrying one's greatness with a deep sense of humility. Let us not forget that in his earlier life Andy was a trained primary school teacher and that through his music he was also teaching many positive values to the rest of the world. His greatest legacy to all of us will be the lessons he championed throughout his artistic life.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE!

*Joseph O. Palacio*

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