

# The Manhattan Times Profile: Juleyka Lantigua

by Claudia Cruz

"I didn't realize that I was going to be a writer until it hit me. It's like learning that the love of your life is a guy you've known since kindergarten. He's always been there but not until now did you know he was the one."

Juleyka Lantigua is definitely in love with the written word. This young Dominican-born writer is not embarrassed to admit that she prefers staying at home on a Saturday night reading or writing. That's not an unusual decision either considering that Juleyka's schedule is already packed with many activities so albeit staying home some weekends, Juleyka is a very busy individual.

Her careful attention to the written language and highly professional nature have afforded her many opportunities to excel as a writer. As managing editor of the ultra hip Urban Latino magazine, as a journalism teacher at the Frederick Douglas Creative Arts Center, and as a syndicated columnist with the Progressive Media Project, Juleyka is never at a loss for words.

Juleyka believes that the "ability to communicate with the written word is by far one of the most amazing skills." As a writer, Juleyka aims to inform and educate people so that they can better understand the world around them. "If you are a brilliant doctor and can perform a complicated surgery effortlessly,

it is not going to do you any good if you cannot command spoken or written words."

This declaration is typical Juleyka since much of her writing does focus on informing. In Urban Latino's Dec/Jan 2002 issue her column addressed the issue of renters insurance and in an editorial published in November in the Miami Herald, Juleyka raised the issue of the lack of information available to Dominicans in the wake of the crash of American Airlines Flight 587.

The oldest of four siblings, Juleyka declares that she must have the right "chromosomes for loving words." Juleyka, who credits her grandfather for inspiring her to become a writer shared that her "grandfather wrote poetry and spoke 5 different languages and when I learned this at 22, it became clear to me that all these years I too had a natural inclination towards writing."

Not surprising, Juleyka's talent was already apparent at Walton High School in the Bronx, since she was editor in chief of her high school newspaper and scored a perfect score in the English advance placement exam for college.

Still not obvious to Juleyka that writing would be her true passion, she entered Skidmore College determined to become a lawyer and also the first Dominican Supreme Court judge. She was



Juleyka Lantigua

even accepted into law schools but soon realized that it wasn't her true calling.

Instead, Juleyka went on to earn a Master of Science in Journalism degree from Boston University and after being awarded a Fulbright scholarship, she ventured out to Spain to complete research on immigration policy. There, Juleyka helped launch a monthly newspaper (Prensa del Caribe) and a quar-

terly magazine (En Diálogo).

During that period, Juleyka reported on the death of a Dominican woman whom the mainstream press had written off as just another unlucky casualty of violence, but to Juleyka this woman represented so much more. "When I started researching there was nothing about her life as a struggling immigrant," commented Juleyka. Motivated by this incident, Juleyka sought to bring to light the difficulties and perils of immigrant life in Spain. "To me the lack of information is injustice," she adds.

Moving into Washington Heights (or Quisqueya Heights as she fondly calls the neighborhood) after returning from Spain led Juleyka to work on her first book project, *Memories of an Immigration, a collection of essays by Dominican Immigrant Children*. Juleyka believes it is important to encourage children to read and write and though writing is not for everyone, "language is fundamental," she declares.

Her desire to motivate aspiring writers explains her involvement with the Women In Literature and Letters (WILL), a collective of women writers who support one another with some of the more complicated aspects of writing such as selecting agents or even proofreading. "WILL is a great collec-

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