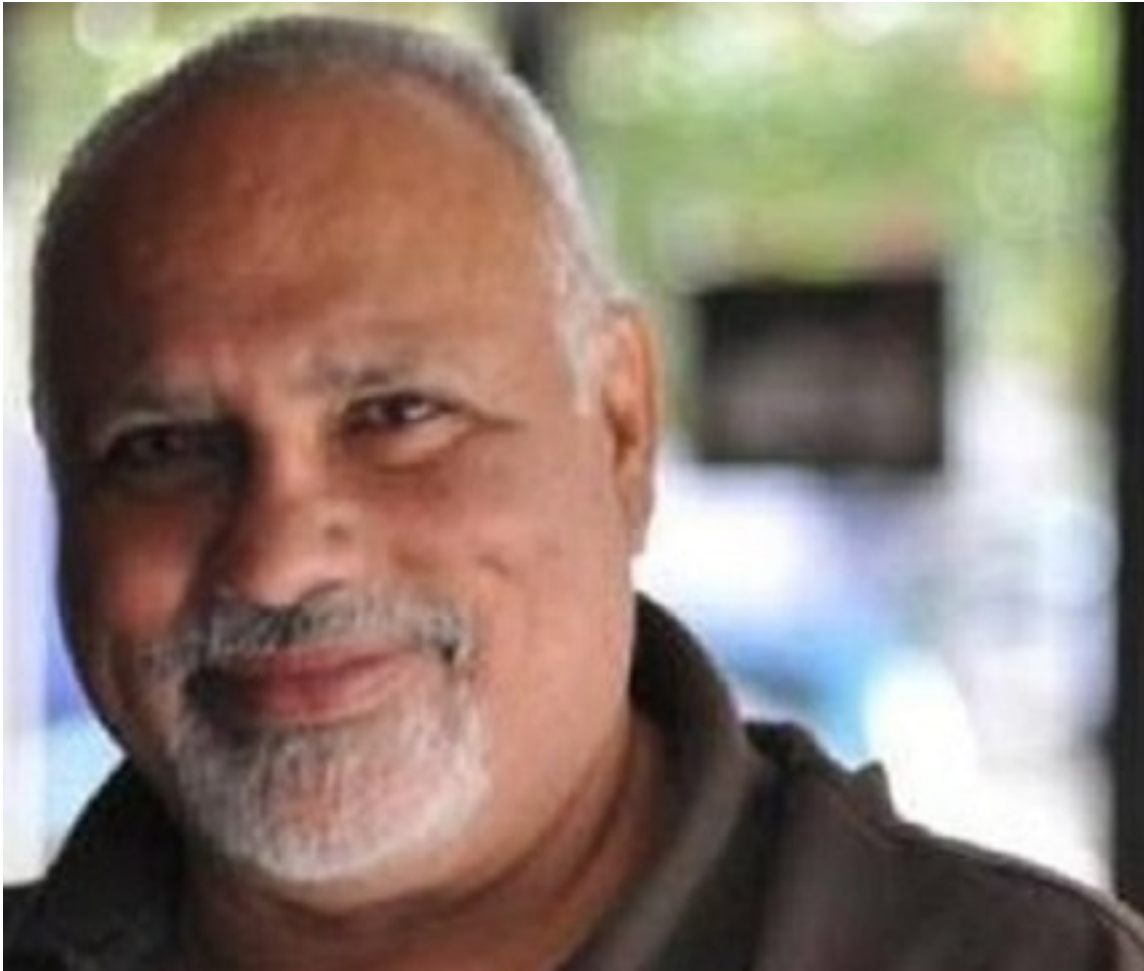


The Passing of a Legend: Eduardo "Pancho" Cruz

Escrito por Claridad

Jueves, 25 de Junio de 2015 11:28



Eduardo "Pancho" Cruz was born in Bayamón, Puerto Rico on May 10, 1948, but grew up in the Lower East Side of New York City. The youngest of four siblings, Eduardo attended school at Our Lady of Sorrows and then went on to Seward Park High School. He graduated from the City College of New York (CUNY), and later from the Seton Hall University School of Law in New Jersey.

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In 1968, while attending City College of New York, Eduardo became a leader of PRISA (Puerto Ricans Involved in Student Affairs), a Puerto Rican student group dedicated to Puerto Rican self-determination and community organizing. In April 1969, as a leader of the "Committee of Ten," he led the famous student takeover of the City College Campus demanding Black and Puerto Rican Studies, increased Black and Puerto Rican admissions, and student participation in decision making for the SEEK program at City College. For months, with community support throughout New York City, the students held the South Campus until the City College administration conceded to their demands. Previous to this takeover, the minority student body at CUNY was small and usually limited to the SEEK program for "underprivileged" students. The City College takeover led to the development of an Open Admissions program in 1970 and to Black and Puerto Rican Studies departments at CUNY and other universities. Minority students at CUNY today can trace their enrollment at CUNY to the legacy of the struggle led by Eduardo Cruz and other students at City College in 1969. This struggle, based on interviews with Eduardo Cruz and other student activists, is documented in "The Puerto Rican Student Union," a chapter in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, (Temple U. Press, 1998) and in "Puerto Ricans and Educational Civil Rights" (CENTRO Journal, 2009).

In March 1970, Eduardo Cruz was arrested for alleged possession of explosives tied to the struggle for Puerto Rican Independence, and was sentenced to an eight-year sentence in New York state prisons. He was seen as a political prisoner and his case was tied into the campaign to free the 5 Nationalist Puerto Rican political prisoners. The slogan "Free the 5 Nationalist Prisoners and Pancho Cruz" was the call of the movement. While in prison, his vision was severely affected as a result of negligence by prison authorities. Eduardo became a leader for prison rights at Comstock and other prisons, while attempts to transfer him to prisons known for lobotomies, electro-shock, psycho-surgery, and mind-destroying drugs" led to increased protests for his freedom. As a result of outside pressure, Eduardo's sentence was reduced to a three-year prison sentence, with an additional two years on parole.

In 1974, he returned to City College to complete his degree in Philosophy and returned to activism in the Lower East Side. He participated in the community take over of a day care center on Houston Street, where he met his future wife Jan Orner. Eduardo also became a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in the Lower East Side, and was a well-known organizer in the district.

In 1980, Eduardo Cruz attended Seton Hall Law School in Newark, NJ, where he graduated in 1984 with his law degree. He had to struggle with the NJ Bar's Character Committee to be accepted in the Bar because of his prior felony conviction. He was very proud of his arguments before the Bar, which accepted the political nature of his prior conviction. Cruz became a Public Defender for many years in Essex and Hudson counties in NJ. Later in private practice, he was known for his pro-bono work in serving the community in New York and New Jersey.

An athlete at heart, basketball was his favorite sport. He organized the Haven Plaza Youth Baseball team with his wife, Jan Orner-Cruz. Eduardo loved science fiction, cartoons, and sweets, even with his food allergies.

Eduardo Cruz passed away on Sunday, June 21, 2015 in New York City due to complications

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after spinal surgery. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jan Orner-Cruz; his father, Ramón Cruz; his mother, Magdalena López Padín; and his brother Raymond Cruz. He is survived by his daughters Dana Cruz, Kim Cruz-Barrero, and his grandson, Benjamin Alexander Barrero.

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