

A Message from Yvette Soto & the Atlantic County Puerto Rican Parade 01-31-14

On behalf of the Atlantic County Puerto Rican Parade, I, Yvette Soto, President of the organization want to share these words with you about our angel Dr. James Gilliam, Jr., or how we called him Dr. G.

Dr. G started working with the Atlantic County Puerto Rican Parade in 1999, when we first developed the concept of having an annual parade and festival to celebrate the culture of Puerto Ricans and Latinos. At that time Robert Maldonado founded the parade idea, I founded the Latin Music Festival idea and Dr. G. founded and created the Educational Component of the organization, what is now known as the Youth Advisory Council.

Dr. G became the Historical Archivist and Treasurer of the organization, where he provided hundreds of workshops about the Caribbean Basin and history of Puerto Rico and surrounding countries. One of the components that he did much research on was the fact that Africans were brought to the Caribbean 100 years before they were brought to the United States. He spent many hours studying Puerto Rican history and the importance of the Caribbean Basin.

On a more personal note, Dr. G became my mentor, my guide-Dr. G was my second dad. He taught me so much about my culture and my history. We would spend hours talking about the struggles and the importance of making a difference in children's lives and teach them the values of getting a good education and become leaders of tomorrow.

I had the opportunity of making one of his dreams a reality, when we both traveled to Puerto Rico with the National Puerto Rican Parade committee and we're part of the national conference. We experienced the best Puerto Rican cuisine, visited memorable places like Old San Juan where much of the history lies.

In 2005, we developed the Youth Advisory Council's concept. Our organization mentors Latino children in assisting them with the University process: from applying to Financial Aid through FAFSA and university selection to following up with them after they get their college education. Our organization has a partnership with the University of Puerto Rico, where students can go and spend a year or 2 and learn about their culture and go through the education experience. University of Puerto Rico is known for having some of the best engineering schools in the world. All this was made possible by our dear Dr. G.

To Dr. G's daughter Nikki, I want to say that my heart and soul are with you on this day. Thank you my sister for sharing your dad with me all these years. I want to remember him as the father that he was, as the friend that was always there when we needed him and as the mentor that taught me that everything is possible if you set your mind to it. I know I have gained an angel in heaven. His historical articles and research will live forever. A few years ago, some of his research archives were sent to the Newark Public Library for them to be included in their New Jersey Puerto Rican History collection.

Today, although my heart is broken and I feel a piece of me is with him, I want to celebrate his life, his teachings, his beliefs and will make sure to continue his legacy. I love you Dr. G. Thank you for walking with me all these years and thank you for fighting the struggle with us. You will always be remembered as the father of the Atlantic County Puerto Rican Parade. I love you so much. Till we meet again.

To the Gilliam family: my prayers and thoughts are with you. Celebrate his life and write down the beautiful memories you shared with him. God bless all of you. Yvette Soto, ACPRP President

