

Celebrating the Life of
Rosa Guy



Sunrise

September 1, 1922

Sunset

June 3, 2012

Service

Saturday, June 9, 2012 - 2:00 p.m.

UNITY FUNERAL CHAPELS, INC.

2352 8th Avenue • New York, NY 10027

Obituary

In 1966 Rosa Guy dedicated her first published novel, “Bird At My Window”, to the memory of Malcolm X, “... the pure gold salvaged from the gutter of the ghetto in which we live.” This dedication indicated that she was not only an author who would become prolific, but also a lifetime activist. At the time of her death from cancer on June 3rd, in her Manhattan apartment, she had published over twenty books, won numerous awards, and was internationally acclaimed. Her novel, “My Love, My Love, Or The Peasant Girl”, published in 1985, was adapted into the hit Broadway Play, “Once On This Island. Nominated for eight Tony awards it has been consistently revised here and abroad and is presently playing in New Jersey.

Rosa was seven when her family migrated from Trinidad to Harlem. Her parents were Audrey and Henry Cuthbert. When her mother became ill Rosa was sent to live in Brooklyn with a cousin who was a devout Garveyite. Her politics of black nationalism profoundly affected Rosa who for the rest of her life defined herself as an Africanist fighting against colonialism and the exploitation of the masses.

Orphaned at fourteen, Rosa found employment in Manhattan’s garment center. She worked there for several years and was an active organizer in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) which she claimed was rampantly racist.

At nineteen she married Warner Guy, and bore him a son, Warner Charles. While her husband was a Sergeant in the army during World War II, Rosa became active with the American Negro Theatre where she met fellow members, Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Ruby Dee and Alice Childress. “I was young and wanted to be an actress,” Rosa claimed. In 1946 she and her husband were divorced. Shortly thereafter she joined the Committee for the Negro in the Arts, and wrote and acted in a one-act play, “Venetian Blinds.” There she met John Oliver Killens.

In 1951 she co-founded with Killens the Harlem Writers Guild along with the historian John Henrik Clarke and Walter Christmas. Rosa explained, “What we wanted was to have a group that really projected the life, the style, the dialogue, the expression that could only come from the black experience in the United States.” Early members of the group were Paule Marshall, Maya Angelou, Sarah Wright, Alice Childress, Audre Lorde, and Douglass Turner Ward. The Harlem Writers Guild is still in existence today sixty-one years later.

Rosa was a regular at the United Nations in 1960 and was often given passes to attend the Security Council debates. When Prime Minister Lumumba of the Congo came to the United Nations asking for support against Belgian troops who were slaughtering his people, Rosa became part of his entourage as he traveled around the country. When Lumumba was assassinated in 1961, rage against Dag Hammarskjöld at the United Nations was worldwide. It was felt that his actions led to Lumumba’s death. Rosa, Maya Angelou, Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach and others stormed into the Security Council at the U.N., interrupting a speech by Adlai Stevenson. The guards were called and a melee ensued. All that day enraged groups protested from one end of Manhattan to the other. “That rage became a part of us,” Rosa said, “a rage that went on to become part of the Black Revolution of the sixties and the seventies and the Black Power Movement.”

Rosa’s second novel, “The Friends” was published in 1973, followed by the novels “Ruby” and “Edith Jackson”, forming a trilogy. They have been praised for dealing with the powerful forces of race, sex and class that operate in the lives of black adolescent girls as they come of age. Many of the author’s female fans state that her books have helped them define themselves and to better understand their own sexuality. Another trilogy is about black adolescent boys coming of age amid violence and crime in a deteriorating Harlem where drug addicts nod in burned out buildings. These complex characters raise provocative questions about human potential, responsibility and the insidious problems of poverty.

Rosa believed that the responsibility of writers is to try and make the world a better place for us all. A book reviewer said admiringly of her, “Rosa Guy is that rare breed, a story teller, may her tribe increase.” Her tribe did increase. Surviving her are five grandchildren all named Guy—Didier, Warner, Charles, Alice and Ameze, and a grand nephew Kwise Onwubuemeli, eight great grandchildren and other relatives and friends including goddaughters Eve and Kathe Sandler.

Order of Service

Music and Images

Master of Ceremonies.....George Faison

Obituary.....Louise Meriwether

Musical Selection

Remarks.....Helen Brodie Baldwin

Remarks.....Eve Sandler

Remarks.....Grace Edwards, Harlem Writers Guild

Performance.....Vinie Burrows

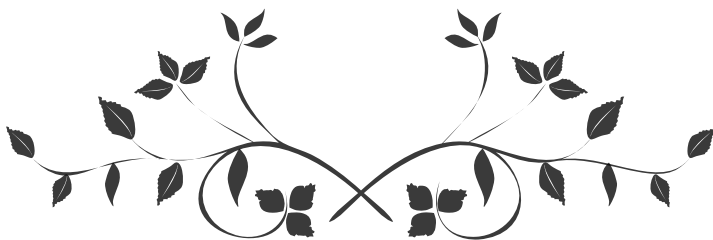
Musical Selection


Remarks.....Warner Guy, grandson

Remarks.....Ashley Guy, great granddaughter

Remarks.....Open Floor

Closing Remarks





....I
am a black woman
tall as a cypress
strong
beyond all definition still
defying place
and time
and circumstance
assailed
impervious
indestructible

Look
On me and be
Renewed

From I Am A Black Woman
by Mari Evans

Acknowledgement

The family wishes to thank everyone for their condolences
and best wishes during our time of bereavement.

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