

TRUE SOUTH FLORIDA STORY: ROSA'S CORNER

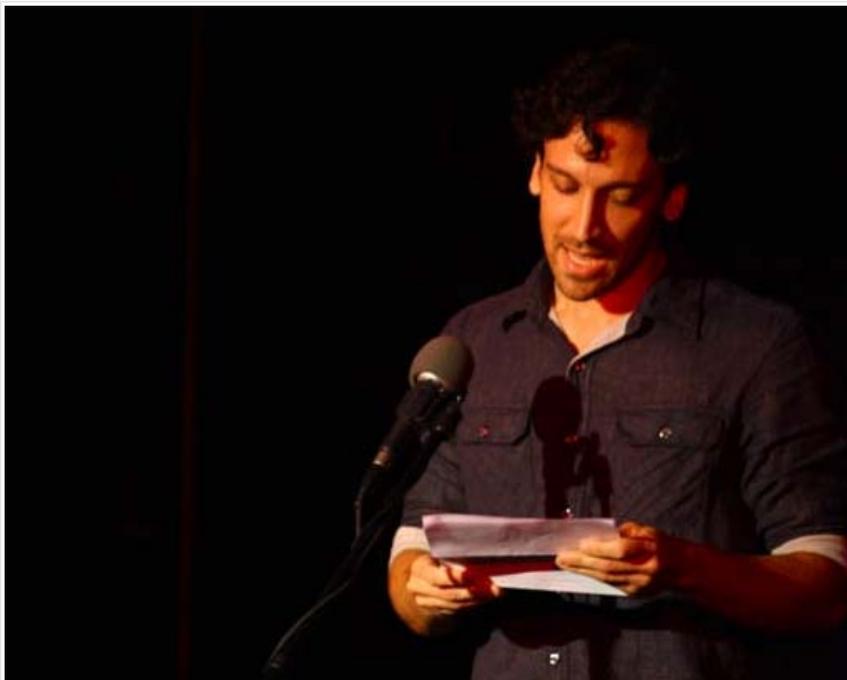
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Terence Cantarella shares his story with the audience. (Photo by David Samayoa / Under the Sun)

Terence Cantarella read his story *Rosa's Corner* at a live event produced by *Under the Sun* and *Lip Service* at the Miracle Theatre in Coral Gables. The sold-out event featured true stories about life in South Florida. The full show will air on WLRN June 4-5.

BY TERENCE CANTARELLA

"In Miami, sex is always just around the corner." Those are the words of my Cuban friend José. Not too long ago I found sex in Hialeah, literally, on a corner.

Rosa was an older woman, probably in her fifties. She sold cold bottles of water at a busy intersection in a part of Miami that never makes it into travel brochures. She was a beauty once. You could see that in the way she carried herself, like a woman who was used to being looked at. But Rosa had lived a hard life. That was obvious, too. The sun had done its work on her skin. Her long hair was going gray. Her body had rebelled a long time ago.

SOUTH FLORIDA STORIES



Image by: Luigi Diamanti

Under the Sun collaborated with *Lip Service* to produce a live event at the Miracle Theatre in Coral Gables featuring the best true stories about South Florida submitted by readers.

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LISTENER FEEDBACK

"I would not have believed that a radio piece could so capture the smell, sight, temperature of a hospital tent in Haiti and plunge me to feel the despair and bewilderment of the medical volunteers as they experienced the pain and suffering in the aftermath of the earthquake. Then to miraculously convey the feeling of hope brought on by one person who understood the healing power of music and of a thankful heart to lift all that despair. I cried and then I raised my face toward heaven and said "Thank you!" — Susan (in response to the Project Medishare story)

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She still made an effort. Rosa painted her tired eyes dark blue. She wore dangly earrings and white stretchy pants. She reapplied bright red lipstick throughout the day. When she smiled at me, I could see the red smear across her teeth.

Every workday for six months, I pulled up to Rosa's intersection in my FedEx delivery truck. I was always sweaty and in a rush. She would hurry over, slide open the door, place a bottle of water in my lap and flash her red teeth at me. "No monee. Gratis," she said.

She only knew a handful of words in English. My Spanish wasn't much better. But Rosa stood by my door until the light turned green, smiling and chatting and calling me names like mi cielo, mi vida, and mi amor.

She said she got hungry working at the intersection, and mentioned she loved McDonald's apple pies. But she couldn't leave her spot because someone might steal the water bottles from her coolers.

She kept me hydrated for free. I fed her pies.



Terence shares a laugh with the audience.
(Photo by David Samayoa / Under the Sun)

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difficult to pinpoint the nature of her quirkiness. One day, she put her hand on my knee and asked, "Papito, cuando vamos a hacer...?" Then she said a word that I didn't understand.

"I'm sorry," I said. "No entiendo."

She thrust out a hip, made a fist and pumped it sideways in the air. She said, "You. Me. Chaka-chaka."

I froze. Chaka-chaka didn't need translating.

"Pero..." I summoned the best excuse I could manage in Spanish, "tengo un amor a la casa." I have a love at home.

"But you are young," she said. "You should have many women. Not just one."

Rosa told me about a man named Pablo who controlled the neighborhood. Pablo kept a close eye on Rosa, and took part of her earnings. When I asked her questions about Pablo, she squinted and backed away from my truck. "Tu trabajas para Pablo?"

I assured her – no, I was not on Pablo's payroll. But for the next few days she seemed uneasy. "Pablo," she said, "es muy malo."

I asked nearby business owners about Pablo but no one had heard of him. I asked about Rosa, too. Everyone said she was crazy.

A young woman approached my truck at Rosa's corner one day and asked about the nearest FedEx station. I wrote the address on a slip of paper and handed it to her. Rosa was watching from the sidewalk. Later, when I stopped at the intersection again, Rosa demanded to know why I had given my phone number to that puta.

At that moment, I realized Rosa was odd. But our interactions never lasted more than the length of one red light, so it was



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I fumbled for a response.

Rosa patted my hand and said we could talk about it tomorrow.

The next day Rosa pretended not to see me, and my giant FedEx truck. She ignored me for the rest of the week, too. Finally, she came to me with a question. "Papito, you are gay?"

"No," I said.

She pointed at my crotch. "You have problem?"

"No. No problem."

"Entonces," she pumped her fist, "why, no?"

I'd had a week to think about how to let her down gently. "Because of Pablo," I told her.

Rosa's eyes opened wide. "Te dijo algo?"

"No," I said, "He didn't say anything to me. But he's dangerous. I don't want trouble."

She nodded. "Pablo es loco."

Then the light turned green.

The next day, I didn't see Rosa. I didn't see her for the rest of the week, either. I asked a nearby security guard if he'd seen her. He told me she'd been hit by a car during the weekend and died. I checked online and found a small item about a pedestrian who was struck and killed. The article didn't print her name, only the driver's – it wasn't Pablo.

Whenever I pass that corner now, or buy an apple pie, I miss Rosa. She was, for me, the embodiment of Miami. She had a playful spirit, zero inhibition, a well-worn-but-still-hungry look. And she told unverifiable stories about a man named Pablo.

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