

Cafe Con Oscar

By Erika Gisela Abad Merced

In this piece, the narrator explores what she hopes to be able to discuss once reunited with mentor, Oscar. Pulling inspiration from a decade of letter writing to political prisoner, Oscar Lopez Rivera, the narrator wonders when they will be able to have a conversation about he means to anyone working for social change.

For ten years, when concerned with the treatment of women in grassroots work, when coming out and dealing with the ensuing racism and homophobia that follow, when grappling with underemployment and what such a position allowed me to witness for the first time, I write Oscar to come to terms with what I can change with what I cannot control.

His letters are a beacon of hope. More than that, his letters remind me the importance of why I write--as an artist, as a person who needs to take responsibility for her own story, as a woman who feels called to take action despite the overwhelming reality of what it means and what we all know we risk--his stories tell me why it's important to keep going. Knowing where he is, why he is there puts a lot of my frustrations and my impatience in perspective. His letters were comfort at many moments when I could not rely on anything or anyone else.

But it's not enough to keep writing him or writing about what writing him means. It's not enough to write him, to thank him, to hear his counsel in letters written. It's not enough to buy pasteles for the fundraisers held for his freedom. It's not enough to demand he come home. It's not enough because the work does not end there. It's not enough because we need to remember why he was there and why we are here, here able to read about who he is, about what he's done. It's not enough because we need to make sure all of us remember what it meant--what it means.

When I think about how to best capture the significance of his release, and the history I want to spend the next few years recovering from his and other former political prisoner letters

Writing Raw

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from prison, I think about compartiendo cafe. Quiero compartir cafe con Oscar. Lo quiero compartir con el cuando hablamos of the nuances his letters cover. Quiero compartir cafe con el mientras debatimos privileges I often forget while I am writing and reviewing themes in letters, speeches and news articles. Quiero compartir cafe con Oscar while I gather family and friends' stories because to write and read about what he means to so many of us is not enough. He has the right to see it, to breathe it, to taste it, to feel the warmth of it outside of prison walls.

We owe him that much because, as his letters continue to remind me, he has faith in us, in what we can do, even when we do not believe we should or we can. Y quiero compartir cafe con Oscar to say thank you. Thank you for never letting us forget.

Erika Gisela Abad Merced bio: Erika Gisela Abad Merced is a poet, scholar, essayist and fiction writer. She has since published essays at The Feminist Wire, Black Girl Dangerous and Latino Rebels. Her poems have been published by La Respuesta, Mujeres De Maiz and Dialogo. Her fiction has been published in Read Vitality and Outrider Review.