

## **Gramercy Park Block Association- Neighborhood News #667**

### **The National Arts Club's Miguel Serrano Our Gramercy Park Hero Mourned**

Miguel Serrano, aged 52, passed away the morning of August 2nd. Not even his sister or nephew knew, until they were summoned to the hospital last week, that he was suffering from lung cancer. That was our Miguel Serrano; courageous to the very end. We can only conclude that he did not want anyone to share his suffering.

On January 12th, 2011 I received a call from Miguel Serrano. "I need your help. I have information I have to get to the press. I was fired December 17th from the National Arts Club but this has nothing to do with that. I have to talk to the press. I love the club, I can't let them destroy it, I need your help!"

On January 25th, 2011 the first of many articles by DNA editor Amy Zimmer appeared in DNA info, "the city's leading neighborhood news source". Thus began the close collaboration between Miguel Serrano and Amy Zimmer that spanned over the next two and a half years. My role...to send their stories to our 70 media sources and to forward them to the Attorney General and District Attorney's office investigators who had worked from 2002-2003 with our Gramercy Park Community on their previous investigation of the National Arts Club which culminated after years of legal actions against the Gramercy Park community by the club. As articles soon began appearing around the country (close to 200), many people came forward with information but insisted on talking off the record for fear of retribution. But not Miguel Serrano. No one was more fearless and courageous than him. Zimmer and other reporters told us repeatedly they would have no story without Serrano. He was the only one brave enough to speak on the record. Zimmer recently told us that of the countless people she interviewed there was no one more relentless and determined in standing up for what he believed in than Miguel Serrano.

On March 15th, 2011 the District Attorney's office and the state Attorney General's Office announced that they were launching new probes into the club's finances...it was believed by all involved that this was due to the extensive press coverage that had been initiated by Serrano working with Zimmer.

On June 5th, 2012 DNAinfo.com announced that Amy Zimmer had won the 2012 Deadline Club Award, from among 440 entries, for her reporting on the National Arts Club Scandal. It



Miguel Serrano and Arlene Harrison at the June 10, 2013 Gala party for GPBA members at the National Arts Club

was believed that her "tenacious coverage" along with Miguel Serrano's unwavering courage were directly responsible for prompting the new investigations by these two law enforcement agencies. The press release stated, "Zimmer spent months investigating the National Arts Club, a venerable New York arts and cultural institution rumored to have fiscal management problems. Her reporting prompted a new investigation by the District Attorney and the Attorney General's offices, ultimately resulting in the ouster of the board president, O. Aldon James, after a 25-year tenure."

On July 9th, 2013 the office of the Attorney General announced that after a 2 year investigation it had obtained a \$950,00 settlement and stated, "The message is clear; those who abuse non-profits for personal gain will be held accountable by my office." And according to the Wall Street Journal, "Under the settlement, the James brothers and Mr. Leitner must vacate their premises at the club by the end of July and cannot contest their expulsion from the club. The James brothers are permanently barred from serving as officers, directors or fiduciaries of any nonprofit in New York State."

We believe were it not for Miguel Serrano the James gang might still be living at the National Arts Club.

Miguel- In the year since the investigation ended, every time I passed the National Arts Club and you were once again standing proudly outside greeting people, I would throw my arms around you and tell everyone within earshot, "We love this guy. He is our Gramercy Park Hero". You beamed when I said that. It was almost as if you secretly knew the role you had so proudly played in the club's glorious future. Our Gramercy Park community will always be grateful to you, Miguel. For it was you who made it possible for our community to return to your beloved National Arts Club, which had once so many years ago been our beloved club as well.

We will never forget you, Miguel. Rest in peace dear friend.

Love Always,

Arlene Harrison

President of Gramercy Park Block Association  
Trustee of Gramercy Park

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