

Her face glowed as she sang out and I suddenly saw her for who she truly was, a fighter. Only later would I learn of her life details: her struggle through segregation as an African American woman, her fight for education as the first in her family to go to college, the pillar she was within her church throughout her life, and her time as the lead soloist in her choir. All these details I would gather from her great-niece when she came to pick up Mrs. Neal's keepsakes a few weeks later after she had passed away, but her song had foreshadowed everything I needed to know about the kind of woman she was.

She sang the last stanza with everything she had, her eyes alight, as if she was performing for her congregation once again. Then she grew quiet, laid back in bed, and quickly fell asleep. I left that day with a greater understanding for Mrs. Neal, and a realization. After all this time, how could I not know the music that was within her? There was so much I did not know, all the life she had lived, all the stories she never told. Mrs. Neal was not just a patient in the corner of an assisted living facility. She was not just an elderly lady living with renal disease and Alzheimer's. She was a musician, a leader, an activist, a fighter.

The hospice director at the facility once told me that before a chronically ill patient died they might have a burst of energy, a moment of lucidity. The director believed that it was energy given for the person to have the strength to say their goodbyes. I wonder if that was her goodbye to me, a thank you for the friendship we had developed that year. Although our time together didn't involve much talking, I learned many lessons. I learned of the hidden strength that can lie within a human soul. I learned to never judge a person without allowing their story to be told, and I learned about the power of music—its ability to join people together and its power as one of the last strongholds in a mind lost to Alzheimer's. I am thankful for my time with Mrs. Neal and the opportunity to hear what might have been her last song. ■

## XIII

*Yolany Martínez Hyde, PhD  
Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine*

Dentro de la CASA  
llaves y objetos cobran vida. Los AFECTOS.  
Yo afuera, en un reflejo del vidrio de la ventana.  
Lágrimas de mi hija  
robando un paso. Deteniendo el SiLeNcIo. Mis ojos  
no se atreven a decirle la partida. Los suyos incansables me buscan.  
Después de tantos rodeos a mí misma, vacío lo que me queda  
en sus manos pequeñas. Las SELLO  
con la estampa gastada de mis labios. Hoy no me he ido,  
más bien, me he quedado para siempre.

Inside the HOUSE  
keys and other objects come to life. AFFECTIONS.  
I am outside, on the reflection of the window.  
Tears of my daughter  
stealing every step. Detaining SiLeNcE. My eyes  
do not dare to tell her I am leaving. Her eyes tirelessly look for me.  
After going around myself in circles, I empty all what is left  
in her small hands. I SEAL them  
with the worn stamp of my lips. I did not leave today,  
rather, I stayed forever.

*A poem from Este sol que respiro / The Sun I Breathe (2011)*