



René Alberto Campos

September 30, 1946 - July 18, 2025

René Campos was born on September 30, 1946, or at least that is what official documents say. He was actually born on August 19, but he was postdated by a clerical error. This mistake allowed him to claim two birthdays each year, and those who knew him have been happy to celebrate his birth twice over and many times more.

He was born in Corral, a small coastal town in southern Chile. He grew up there and then attended the Universidad de Concepción, where he took an M.Ed. in Spanish in 1970. His career as a teacher of Spanish began at a high school in Concepción, and later he became an instructor at the university. But then in 1973 came the Chilean coup. He might have stayed in Chile had it not been for the violent and repressive dictatorship instituted after the coup. Both to leave the dictatorship and to continue his education, he entered the doctoral program at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1975. There he found lifelong friends, with whom he could argue, play music, sing, and enjoy one other's company. While he was there, he also met the man who was to become his life partner, Joel Brereton, who was teaching in New York at that time. René completed his Ph.D. in 1982 and held several part-time teaching positions in New York until in 1984 he went to the University of Missouri-Columbia, where Joel was then also teaching. Later, in 1992, he joined the faculty at Spelman College in Atlanta, and it was there he spent the best part of his career, the best part in every sense. His classes on Latin

American literature attracted enthusiastic students with whom he shared his passion for the art, literature, and music of South America. His students carefully analyzed novels, they sang folk songs to his accompanying guitar, and they wrote poetry in the style of Pablo Neruda, the Chilean Nobel laureate. As an exile himself, René brought an immigrant's story to his students, giving them a richer understanding for the gifts of both art and democracy.

The originality and diversity of his teaching were reflected also in his scholarship. The intellectual quality that René most admired and that he exemplified in his own work was the ability to find unexpected connections across different forms of art and culture. He was particularly interested in the interconnections between popular culture and the literary arts. His principal work was "Espejos: La textura cinematográfica en La traición de Rita Hayworth" ("Mirrors: The Cinematic Texture in Betrayed by Rita Hayworth"), a book that studied the function of Rita Hayworth's films in the novel by the Argentinian writer, Manuel Puig. He also wrote and lectured on the roles of songs, detective novels, theatrical farce, and film noir in other novels and short stories.

When René went to Atlanta, Joel was still at the University of Missouri until he also left to go to University of Texas, Austin. Academic careers are difficult to coordinate, and while the two were often separated, they were never apart. They commuted between Columbia and Atlanta and then Austin and Atlanta and spent time together whenever they could. In 2010, René retired from Spelman and moved to Austin where Joel and he remained together. Some summers, they traveled to Europe, especially Italy, which René loved. On these travels they visited museums and churches, clubs and ruins, or just walked the streets. But they also spent summers in a lake cottage in Canada, where they visited flea markets and farmers' markets, read, or just watched the wildlife. René found joy in many things and gave joy to many people. After

a long illness, René passed away at his home on July 18, 2025. He is survived by Joel and by his sister, Rosa Campos Pérez, and her children, grandchildren, and greatgrandchildren. We miss him. A memorial for René is planned for October.

Tribute Wall

RU

“ *Dr. Campos was my professor at Spelman. I find myself thinking fondly of him often. I loved his classes, and I learned so much from him. I hope he is resting in peace and I wish I could've seen him again. Gracias profe. ❤️❤️*

Ruby - February 03 at 01:51 PM

“René Campos was a gifted writer, speaker, guitarist and singer. He took pride in his own talent and he liked the attention he attracted because of it. The University of Missouri where he was a professor for six years, had something of a different view of René. University meritocracy made it difficult for René to shine. Indeed he was highly suspicious of that meritocracy: the rewarding of prestige and recognition for achievements he felt were not worthy of such recognition. It wasn't that he was arrogant, far from it; it was that he thought that culture was something not as much to study (and to receive a prize for doing so) but to participate in.

For me René was not only a true intellectual in the best sense of that word, but he had so many other admirable qualities, not the least of which was his love of family. He spoke of his family in Corral, Chile, in glowing terms: his sister Rosa and his mom and dad. René loved my two children (in their teens when he knew them), and he made sure to include my then wife Maurita in virtually every event he planned. My daughter Maura (Molly to Joel and René) said it beautifully a short time after the memorial Joel organized via zoom: The event "brought out emotions I didn't even know I had."

I remember René's beaming face when our mutual friend, Teresa Prados and her husband, came by Joel and René's house to introduce them to her newly born son, Adrián. I remember him holding Adrián in his arms, looking up at everyone surrounding him, smiling from ear to ear and saying, "Soy mamá."

One of my fondest memories of René is an incident that gave me a great deal to think about both at that moment and later on. It was at a party hosted by our dear Argentinian friend, Magdalena García Pinto in the front yard of her house on Broadway in Columbia, Missouri. Magdalena, like René, loved to show off her culinary talents, in this case it was an "asado," the roasted meat that Argentina is well known for. It was something of a going-away party for my family. We were going to spend a year in Spain, far from what some of us considered the confines of Missouri. Many of us in René's and Joel's circle of friends considered themselves out of place in what some of us called "la América profunda." I don't

remember if René had brought his guitar, but I do remember that he broke out into song, a popular tune I had never heard because my cultural registers were confined at that time to the U.S. But virtually everyone in Spain and Latin America knows this song, "Cuando un amigo se va" (When a Friend Leaves). I remember René singing and laughing with Teresa Prados who seemed to know the song by heart. I mistakenly thought René was making fun of me, not at all infrequent in those party situations. But later, as I became slowly immersed into the culture of a land my mother and father had left long ago, I heard that song in all kinds of venues: radio, TV, musical gatherings, people humming the tune while riding the metro. And today every time I hear it I think of René, a true friend who has left us.

*Quando un amigo se va
Queda un espacio vacío
Que no lo puede llenar la llegada de otro amigo.*

*Quando un amigo se va
Queda un tizón encendido
Que no se puede apagar ni con las aguas de un río*

*Quando un amigo se va
Una estrella se ha perdido
La que ilumina el lugar
Donde hay un niño dormido.*

My attempt at translation:

*When a friend leaves
he leaves an empty space,
a space so wide the arrival
of another friend can't fill.*

*When a friend goes away
he leaves a burning ember
so bright that even the mightiest river*

can't put it out.

*When a friend leaves
he leaves a bright star
that shines the on the spot
where a little boy sleeps.*

*René, you're that little boy sleeping under a shining star, and I'll
never forget you.*

Michael Ugarte

Michael Ugarte - November 11, 2025 at 04:44 PM

“ Conocí a René cuando llegó a Stony Brook en 1979, y rápidamente se convirtió en parte del grupo que Rubén y César han mencionado. Éramos, como era de esperar, doctorandos estudiosos que los fines de semana, y al unísono, disfrutábamos cantando, bailando, organizando barbacoas, jugando béisbol, yendo a la playa, al cine, a Manhattan. Recuerdo bien aquellos tiempos, y hoy a René, porque como dice la canción: «Those were the days my friend, those were the days for we were young . . .” o como dice nuestro querido profesor Pedro Lastra en su poema, «cuando éramos inmortales».

Nos graduamos y dispersamos, pero seguimos en contacto. Me fui de Long Island a la Universidad de Columbia en 1978 como Profesora de Literatura Hispanoamericana. Encontré y viví en un apartamento en Riverside Dr., entre las calles 114 y 115, y, ¡vaya sorpresa!, descubrí que Joel y René vivían a una cuadra y media sobre Claremont y la 116. Con René y Joel exploramos la ciudad, sus jardines, parques y museos. Aquellos, de nuevo, fueron días memorables.

Mis tres hijas, recordando a René estos días, me dicen: "Queríamos a todos tus amigos, pero nuestro favorito era René. Él sabía disfrutar de la vida", señalaron mis hijas, "no queremos decir que no hubiera tenido momentos tristes o difíciles, pero siempre encontraba cómo salir adelante, y se ha convertido en un modelo para nosotras". Dicen, y estoy de acuerdo, "René era el alma de la fiesta, siempre el último en irse en su afán por prolongar ese tiempo de goce, por mantenerlo vivo.

Aprecio a René por haberme abierto dos mundos. Conociendo mi amor por la música y las musicales, me llevó a los Piano Bars del Village, (un mundo ajeno para mí), al Five Oakes para escuchar a Marie Blake quien invitaba al público a cantar, y René que nunca fue tímido, participaba con entusiasmo y con su voz de cantante. Recuerdo otro sitio en el que acompañábamos al pianista cantando canciones de los espectáculos de Broadway.

Y agradezco especialmente que me haya presentado a su amigo, el escritor argentino Manuel Puig, un pionero que disfrutó de la cultura popular, tanto para criticarla como para trascenderla, transformando así la narrativa latinoamericana de su tiempo, y a quien René estudiaba, convirtiéndose él, en turno, uno de los primeros en explorar la relevancia de Puig y su obra. El libro de René: Espejos: La Textura Cinemática en La Traición de Rita Hayworth (1985), se ha convertido en una referencia obligada para cualquier estudioso que trabaje sobre Puig o la cultura popular.

Nos pareció una coincidencia fortuita que precisamente en estos días recordando a René, Guillermo y yo viéramos la nueva película musical El beso de la mujer araña. Para mí, se convirtió en una invitación a releer el libro de René sobre Puig. Lo que volví a confirmar fue su curiosidad intelectual, y su rigor académico, y su dedicación al campo de la literatura latinoamericana que gozaba tanto como fiestar. En mi última conversación con René hace unos meses, repasamos nuestros recuerdos de aquellos tiempos. Lo extrañaré, lo extrañaremos siempre. Para concluir, recuerdo una cita de la escritora mexicana Elena Garro: "Somos memoria y la memoria que otros tienen de nosotros." En ese espíritu, René seguirá entre nosotros.

Norma Klahn -Santa Cruz, CA, 28 de octubre, 2025

Norma Klahn - October 28, 2025 at 02:45 PM

NK

“ /Users/nklahn/Desktop/Recordando a René.docx

Norma Klahn - October 28, 2025 at 02:25 PM

RL

“René Campos was both a colleague at Spelman College, where he taught for nearly twenty years, starting in 1992, and a close friend. As an Associate Professor of Spanish, René was always respectful towards students and with other professors. Though usually quiet in meetings, when he did comment it was insightful and thoughtful. In his advanced literature classes René truly shone: students in those classes felt a kinship with him and they gained insights into the music, art and literature of Latin America in a way that helped them go deeper into their own personal connections between art and life. Though he was far away from Chile for many years, it never left the center of his heart, and this impacted his teaching. He would have his students write poetry in the style of Alfonsina Storni or Gabriela Mistral, but telling their own stories as young Black women in the United States. At the end of the semester he would bring his guitar to class and sing with them the music of Violeta Parra or Víctor Jara, wanting them to relate it to the music they knew. René did not seek teaching to advance himself professionally, nor did he ever promote a personal agenda in the classroom. He wanted students to make connections, to see how the great literature of Latin America had meaning in their daily life and their understanding of the world. He wanted his students to have the same passion for art and beauty that he did. Many of us who have taught wonder if we ever have a true effect in the lives of our students. With René it was clear that he did. Our annual student banquet grew into a lovefest for him, when students would extoll the personal importance of his classes in their understanding of the world, and they crowded around him to hug him and to thank him for the impact he had on their lives.

I also knew René as a dear friend for many years. Shy and reserved in a public setting, he became wildly funny, ironic, full of wit and imagination in a more personal space. Once you knew him personally you saw that you became another character in his novel. And the novelesque lives he gave us were so much more interesting than the day to day lives we led. I didn't want to know what René said about me, because I knew it would be too true. One

day I mentioned to my wife that René had seemed a bit down and unhappy. She suggested that we take him for a visit to the Atlanta Botanical Garden to walk around in the sunshine. When we were there René turned to me and said, “Tu esposa es mucho mejor que tú.” “Your wife is so much better than you.” Of the many benefits of having René as a friend, an important one was the chance to enjoy his cooking. I remember a Catholic priest from Mexico who once came to one of René’s parties, and told him at the end, “En el Cielo tú serás el cocinero.” “In Heaven you will be the chef.”

Over the years there were many parties I remember both at René’s apartment and at my house. He often brought out his guitar and sang. A couple of times it was so loud or so late that security came and asked that we tone it down. René, who fled the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, where every door knock at night could induce terror, knew that a knock on the door at night in the United States was in all probability just a suggestion or a request, and he tried to comply, although sometimes a second request was made. It seems so ironic now that the situation has reversed and a knock on the door at night in the U.S. can bring terror, while a knock on the door in Chile is at most an inconvenience.

At a party, if there was a moment of silence, I remember René saying that it was an angel passing overhead. Then he would correct himself and say, “no, we’re in Atlanta, it must be an airplane.” That was so like René, the sense of humor, the sacred and the profane together, the antic wit of his imagination. Wherever he went, René made people’s lives more interesting, and with his passing the world has lost a color from its rainbow.

Rick Langhorst - October 26, 2025 at 09:56 AM

“ RENÉ CAMPOS
In Memoriam

I met René in 1975, the day after he arrived from Chile to Stony Brook, N.Y. The fall semester was about to begin, and Professor Jaime Giordano called me into his office and told me that a young Chilean man had come to study at the university and didn't know anyone. I asked him where I could find him and help him get acquainted with the place. I had arrived a year earlier, in 1974. I asked Giordano where I could find René, and he told me he was in the dorms, in the Stage XII building, but he didn't know which room. Since I lived in the same building, I thought I would find him without difficulty. But there were hundreds of rooms in that building; it would take me hours to go room by room asking for René. It was already after 5:00 p.m., and the administrative offices were closed, so I couldn't ask there about his whereabouts.

While walking down one of the hallways of Stage XII, I was fortunate enough to run into another student from our department who also lived in the building. I told him about the mission I was on, and he said, "Don't worry, we'll find him soon." Juan Escalera, that's what he was called, started shouting René Campos's name in that same hallway. Juan was a giant, about 6'4", but his voice was very high-pitched, so the voice and body didn't match. We hadn't even walked a couple of hallways, Juan's voice at the top of his lungs, when this figure appeared with a scared face, huge, sleepy eyes, and raising hair, saying yes! We introduced ourselves, and I told him why we were looking for him. I think he was pleased. I asked him if he wanted to go to dinner (I used to go to a small restaurant across from the university where you could get dinner for \$3.25), and he told me he hadn't eaten all day.

We became close friends, and René immediately made friends with everyone in the department. In fact, he made very good friends with students I didn't associate with, which was a bit impressive because René was rather shy, of course, unless we were at parties, because with drinks and dancing, René was a different person, cheerful, and he loved to dance, as he said, to Caribbean music. René could

have pursued a musical career as a singer. At parties, he and another great Spanish friend, César Dopazo, would sing all kinds of songs, and we friends would follow along in chorus.

René sang until he couldn't anymore. In his later years, when he lived in Austin with Joel, and we spoke on the phone, he would tell me how bad he was and about the suffering it caused him to no longer be able to sing because he couldn't enunciate the words well or find the right tone for the songs. His great pastime was always reading detective novels or crime novels, and he couldn't do that anymore either. In his last year of life, he told me several times that he wanted to die, that he had become useless. The only thing I have left of life, the only thing I'm holding on to, he used to tell me, is my beloved gringo. Without him, I would have died a long time ago.

Rest in peace, dear friend.

Rubén González - August 02, 2025 at 02:16 PM

CD

I met René during Christmas December 1975. My wife, Elva, and I had just returned from a long vacation in Spain, after completing a post-doctoral stay at the Johns Hopkins University. It was New Years Eve when we bumped into René in a social gathering where all the attendants had “small blood concentrations into their alcoholic streams”. I was sitting in front of René who was discoursing in a loud voice about “gachupines, conquistadores e imperialistas”. I felt I should reply accordingly alluding to poor “indians and criollos”. Our audience had a good time but aligned neither with René nor with me.

After this initial collision we reached a peace agreement during the first party, in which we had the opportunity to sing. Our friendship bloomed naturally and grew over the years.

During 1976 we enjoyed great get-togethers with our Stony Brook friends (Norma Klahn, Lourdes Rojas, Ruben Gonzalez, Francisco Alavarado, Jaime Giordano, Juan Mestas, Pedro Lastra, ...). From those days, I remember René singing “Zamba pa no morir”, whose words I particularly liked. I still sing this song, which brings me a sentimental yearning for the past and I always inevitably visualize the young René.

In 1977, as I recall, René moved to NYC. We continued getting together with René and Joel. René’s musical taste evolved and became more diversified: “Balada para un loco” (Argentina, Roberto Goyeneche), “Je t’attends” (France, Charles Aznavour. “Yo tetón”, in the simultaneous translation of our Puerto Rican friend Rubén), “Runaway” (USA, Del Shannon), ... René had a unique talent and a personal dramatic feeling for wonderful interpretations of these songs and we were delighted both at parties and pubs at the Village. He and Joel were excellent hosts and we enjoyed every second we spent together.

Elva and I left the USA for Spain in August 1978. We got together with René and Joel during our Summer visits to Brookhaven National Laboratory, where I was consulting, from 1979 to 1983. They also organized unusual (for us) parties in their NYC apartment, which we attended with our baby daughter Nayra. We also met René and Joel in Madrid. They came to Spain two or three times and we never failed to travel to Madrid to see them.

The last e-mail I received from René reads: “En la vida hay amores que nunca pueden olvidarse, malgre tout... Y el CD prometido, ubi est? Abrazos y besos a Elva. Para tí lo pensaré. Ciao, caro.” I feel guilty because I never recorded and mailed to you the songs from the good old days you wanted to hear again. But, whenever I sing some of our favourite pieces, I will always think of you and I am sure that you will be listening in a sybarite place in the cosmos, criticizing my poor musical performance. Best. Cesar D.

Cesar Dopazo - October 06, 2025 at 04:45 AM