

15 MINUTES

Coffee Shop proprietor brings 'Big City Casual' to Fort Myers

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@florida-weekly.com

Nita Flores darkly drawn face is coolly offset by turquoise earrings and a tie-dyed t-shirt. She is a multi-continental infusion of Puerto Rican, Lithuanian, Italian, and something else unknown.

"I'm a mutt," she said.

Flores was working by herself last Thursday night, at her Nita's Sweet Bean Café in the Sam's Club Plaza in South Fort Myers. She is 47 years-old and the cliffs-notes version of her life until now reads like a pinball game.

Born into 1960s California, moved to Chicago as a child, moved back to California as a teenager, then back to Chicago as a young adult, then to upstate New York, then back to Chicago (where she met her first husband, the father of her only child, a son). Later, she moved to Tennessee, then to Fort Myers in 1999, where she met her second husband, and purchased The Sweet Bean Café in July of this year.

"I became very independent at a very young age," she said.

She ground coffee and finished up some dishes, preparing for open mic night to begin.

So far the evening was quiet and tame and looked like this: two young girls, similarly dressed, one with straight hair and one with curly, chatting on a couch. A trim man in a sleeveless, grey shirt busily setting up a sound system. Barack Obama standing at a podium, on a muted flat screen television, hung on a wall above a low, half-circle stage. Also on the wall: shiny, paper-mache

frogs and framed electric guitars.

Flores said she had wanted to open the kind of cafe, "where people could play what they want and feel comfortable..."

"Being from Chicago, I'm really used to seeing places like that, and [in Fort Myers] I didn't see that as much. So I guess I wanted to create that."

Opposite the stage, the walls are ornamented with framed photos and album covers, some of her favorite musicians, such as James Taylor, Led Zeppelin, Joni Mitchell and Joan Biaz.

It was near 7 p.m., showtime for the eclectic gathering of musicians that night, and the small room quietly, almost unnoticeably, began to fill up with people and talk.

"We've been on the road now for weeks," one leather vest-wearing, tattooed musician was telling someone. "We've hardly had time to practice."

Outside, it started raining. Guitars and microphones appeared on the stage, now lit in alternating streams of blue, green and red lights. It felt warm and safe, a comfortable mosaic of young and old, musicians and friends, and Flores zipping around serving her "almost world famous" Toffee Coffee (smooth, rich, good with whipped cream and cinnamon). Someone had surrounded the stage with pillows.

"Everybody's an individual and we need to respect each other, and each person's uniqueness," Flores was saying, grabbing a couple of empty coffee mugs and heading for the kitchen.

Someone struck the first note of the night on a twelve string acoustic guitar,



PHOTO EVAN WILLIAMS

Coffee shop proprietor, Nita Flores

and a group of kids came in from the rain; one with long hair and sunglasses easily passed for a teenage Robert Plant. Flores noted that one of the reasons she left Chicago (for the third time) was her job, a social worker in the high-crime Howard Ashland area, at the Evanston border.

"When we heard gunshots, I was like shoving (my son) under the table when he came to work with me," she said.

Flores, who had lived near Wrigley field in North Chicago, said Evanston, a Chicago suburb, was one of her favorite places to hang out as a youth, "because it's beautiful," and that she is still true to her home team.

"I'm rooting for the Cubs," she said. "We don't want a repeat of last time...The curse needs to be lifted..."

Another reason Flores came to Fort Myers was that she found a way to accommodate her son's educational needs here. The 22 year-old now attends law school at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Flores had planned to leave town when her son did, and possibly move North; there would be nothing keeping her.

"But then I fell in love, and here I am," she said. "This is home, until we decide to retire, or get an RV and travel."

If she could sever all ties with Fort Myers and leave in an RV, with her husband, later on this evening after the open mic, this is what she said she would see:

"Oregon. And parts of Tennessee; the Seattle area is beautiful too - Puget Sound. And then there are so many other places. All the little, small towns. I would take the back roads, and explore, and find good folk music."

Catch Flores at her cafe while you can, before adventures or circumstances take her (or you) on a trip elsewhere, or stop in for open mic every Thursday night. In addition, the next three week is Nita's Sweet Bean/Southwest Florida best musician/singer search. Each Thursday night, one open mic performer will be chosen by audience response to be a finalist. On Nov. 1, the finalists will be narrowed to two, and on Nov. 8, the grand prize winner will receive a certificate for a two-night complimentary Caribbean Cruise from Fort Lauderdale to Nassau for two, aboard the majestic Regal Empress. ■

©2007 Porsche Cars North America, Inc. Porsche recommends seat belt usage and observance of all traffic laws at all times.



Does more in second gear than most cars do in fifth.

It begs to perform. It responds without question. It's almost as if it knows exactly where you want to go. Strategically placed for optimal balance and handling, the mid-mounted engine of this Porsche gives you a ride you won't soon forget. The Cayman. Instant gratification has never been so immediate.

The new Cayman. Starting at \$49,400

Premier
Porsche Dealer

Porsche of Naples

www.porscheofnaples.com
800 Tamiami Trail North
Naples, Florida 34102
800-206-5610



New and Used Inventory

Porsche Certified Pre-Owned

'06 Boxster S, Red/Black Leather, Tiptronic, 17,910 Miles, VIN 730241
'06 Boxster, Black/Black Leather, Tiptronic, Only 11,288 Miles, VIN 711210
'06 Cayenne S, Sand White/Havanna, Navigation, 19" Wheels, 19,603 Miles, VIN A62331
'06 Cayenne V6, Black/Black Leather, Navigation, 12,088 Miles, VIN A27017

'06 911 Carrera Coupe, Atlas Grey, Black Leather, 6 Spd, 27,948 Miles, VIN 715203
'05 Cayenne, White, Black Leather, Navigation, 20,359 Miles, VIN A21418
'05 Cayenne S, Titanium/Black Leather, 19" Wheels, 31,627 Miles, VIN A66070
'05 Cayenne Turbo, Arctic Silver, Palm Leather, Options, 32,066 Miles, VIN A92362
'05 911 Carrera 4S Coupe, Guards Red, 6 Spd, Aero Pkg., 14,826 Miles VIN 620061
'04 Cayenne S, Arctic Silver, Grey Leather, Options, 36,850 Miles, VIN A69022

'04 Carrera 4S Cabriolet, Guards Red/Black Leather, Tiptronic, Only 11,460 Miles VIN 653050
'03 Boxster, Meridian/Boxster Red Leather, Tiptronic, 36,126 Miles, VIN 623485
'02 Boxster S, Arctic Silver/Grey Leather, 6 Spd, Options, 24,964 Miles, VIN 661071
Select Pre-Owned
'06 Cayenne S Titanium Edition, Executive Demos, Low Miles, 2 To Choose From
'99 Carrera Cabriolet, Arctic/Silver, Grey Leather, 6 Spd, Only 33,879 Miles, VIN S656521