



*A CALIFORNIA PUBLIC NONPROFIT PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATION*

I was born December 16th, 1970, in Havana Cuba. I was raised and educated with love, unity, and respect in the middle of a revolutionary family. For the first eleven years of my life I lived with my parents, my younger brother, and my maternal grandparents, in their home. This time of my life is still very alive in my memory. Our family and friends would get together once a week to talk, debate, argue, read, analyze opinions, thoughts, and philosophies. There would be hours of intense and passionate discussion of how to move forward with the intent of making the world a better place.



I moved to a new house with my parents and my brother when I turned eleven. During this time, I began to develop a real relationship with nature. The new house was to the east of the city of Havana in a place called Alamar. I would get home from school and immediately go out to explore new places, beaches, caves, and hills. When I turned fourteen, I began taking my first woodcarving classes and it was during these classes, that I acquired the foundation for what would come to be my artistic work. At 17, I began to consciously dedicate myself to woodcarving, studying with friends who were master sculptors and carvers. This was the real beginning of my career as an artist and woodcarver.

In 1992 I began working in a printing facility that was transformed into an art studio due to lack of paper in the country at that time. There I made and sold my carvings. In 1996, I moved to the



eastern side of the island to the province of Granma, to a town called Nuevo Mundo in the municipality of Pilon. I built a house there and began to work as a Cultural Promoter. In the mountains I learned to live an extremely fundamental and basic lifestyle. I also learned from local healers about uses and preparations for herbal medicine. The seven years I lived in Nuevo Mundo, were intensely educational. During that time, I made annual trips to Havana to visit my family. On these trips I brought them gifts that my grandmother especially appreciated. She had fond memories from her youth of the things I would bring back, like clear wild honey from the white campanilla flowers and fruits that were difficult to find in Havana. I would also bring my art pieces, which I sold, gave away, or exhibited in Havana.

In 1997, I participated in a theatre piece in Havana at the Wilfredo Lam center called El Puente (The Bridge), under the direction of Jorge Ferrera and Delia Coto in which my masks were used for props. In 1998, I began working with a group Brigada Verde (Green Brigade) that was formed with the mission of educating people about recycling and protecting the environment through annual music and dance festivals. With this group my artistic repertoire expanded beyond sculptures to set design, installations, dance, and poetry. I participated in a total of five festivals.



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During this year I also published poetry in a poetry magazine Mantis, edited by poet, critic, and translator, Omar Perez Lopez. In 1999, I joined the literary club called, Amigos del Libro (Friends of the Book). I also helped promote literature as part of a commission of the Municipal Library. I decided to create a small library for the community in my home in Nuevo Mundo. I brought books there from Havana, and received donations from the Library of Pilon. In Pilon, I also participated in various arts festivals, including Ferias de Arte Popular (Popular Art Fair), where I was given awards for my work by Fiestas por la Cubania (Celebrations for Cubania). In 2000, I participated in a poetry festival called the Fourteenth of February and also completed an artist management course at National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, UNEAC. The same year my poems were published in the poetry magazine La Isla Infinita (The Infinite Island), edited by Cintio Vitier.

Back in eastern Cuba, specifically in Nuevo Mundo, my existence was totally dedicated to life in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, my art, and poetry. One of the biggest influences that initially motivated me to move to the mountains was the spiritual path that I began to explore in the 1990s. In 1998 I met my Padrino (godfather), in the Palo Monte Afro-Cuban tradition. His name was Lazaro Simms de Prez. Around this time, I also learned about Zazen (Zen meditation) from my mentor and friend Omar Perez. He made a trip out to see me in Nuevo Mundo with his Zafu meditation pillow. The day after he arrived, he showed me how to sit Zazen. I asked him, "What is this for?" and he told me "Nothing, just do it". After Omar showed me about Zazen, I continued to practice intermittently, and during my trips to Havana, I would sometimes attend the Dojo there.

I came to the US in 2005. Immediately following my arrival to the Bay Area in California, I began visiting the Berkeley Zen Center. Zazen meditation continues to be a very significant practice in my life. Also following my arrival, I began a year-long wood-technology course at Laney College in Oakland. While I was working there, I was offered a job as an apprentice cabinet-maker and woodworker at Lawrence Construction in Richmond. I worked there for three years while simultaneously teaching woodcarving classes to youth and adults at the Crucible Industrial Arts School in Oakland where I continue to work to this day. In 2011 I met Nina Basker; we fell in love and quickly saw that our visions and goals ran parallel. In 2011 we went to Nuevo Mundo and began the first of many projects in this community.



We share our lives now with our baby boy, Inti, and have founded the organization Bay Area Cuba Community Alliance, or BACCA. Currently, I teach my classes, create wood sculptures and poetry, and am in the process of learning Super Adobe Earth Bag Construction, through an apprenticeship with Nina's father Paul, and extremely accomplished contractor with 40 year of experience in his field. Through BACCA we are working towards our many goals for the community in and around Nuevo Mundo and the further development of our vision for this area that is so close to my heart.