



SAVES

From Rafter to Poet

Greetings to all. My name is Rodrigo de la Luz, and this is my story. I was born in Havana, Cuba. My father was a political prisoner because he opposed the government of my country. Due to this, my family was subjected to the repercussions brought on by our neighbors and those who supported the political establishment. Growing up, my passion was in the arts. I studied acting and writing, but even my professors would disapprove of my writings and my lack of support for the "Cuban system".



Rodrigo de la Luz, a modern day poet

I knew that my only option was to leave, so I joined a group of like minded individuals who wanted to migrate to the United States. Our only option was to build a raft, leave the coast of Cuba without being noticed, and successfully reach the southern coast of Florida without being intercepted by the US Coast Guard. This is no easy task. Believe it or not, it was on our 13th attempt that we were finally successful.

I arrived at Key West on the 14th of February, 1998. I had some family members living in Miami that were willing to help, so I decided to stay here. In the beginning, I was afraid to express my feelings after having

lived under a military dictatorship for 30 years.

Add to this the fact that I did not speak any English because in Cuba, we were taught Russian. I realized early on that if I wanted to get ahead in this new land, I had to learn English. I heard about the SAVES Program on Radio Mambi while listening to Ms. Magda Orta. She mentioned that Cuban parolees were eligible to receive free English classes and free books, and I knew that this was my chance. I registered at The English Center, and this is where I met Ms. Mirella Perez, Ms. Josefa Aguiar and the rest of the SAVES staff.

As a SAVES client at The English Center, I received all my books for my ESOL classes for free, but the service that really helped was the free monthly bus pass that I qualified for. The bus pass allowed me to come to school on a regular basis, to get to work and to move around the city.

I never gave up on my goal to become an artist. While working long hours at my job and with my English studies, I continued writing poetry, painting and sculpting. Every dream is possible. Dedication is the key factor to reaching that dream, and as a result, I have had two poetry books published and have sold various paintings in local galleries. I am currently in the negotiating process with publishing companies to publish two additional books. In support of my books, I will be touring Europe in the month of October, and I will participate in the 2008 Miami Book Fair.

I would like to thank the staff at The English Center for all of their help, particularly my ESOL teacher, Ms. Cano, for her support, and Ms. Mirella Perez, for her magical inspiration. Finally, a special thanks to Dr. Edwina Hoffman for having the vision to create the SAVES Program.

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