

Jimmy Santiago Baca

Born in New Mexico of Indio-Mexican descent, Jimmy Santiago Baca was raised first by his grandmother and later sent to an orphanage. A runaway at age 13, it was after Baca was sentenced to five years in a maximum security prison that he began to turn his life around: he learned to read and write and unearthed a voracious passion for poetry. During a fateful conflict with another inmate, Jimmy was shaken by the voices of Neruda and Lorca, and made a choice that would alter his destiny.

Instead of becoming a hardened criminal, he emerged from prison a writer. Jimmy sent three of his poems to Denise Levertov, the poetry editor of *Mother Jones*. The poems were published and became part of *Immigrants in Our Own Land*, published in 1979, the year he was released from prison. He earned his GED later that same year.

Jimmy is the winner of the Pushcart Prize, the American Book Award, the International Hispanic Heritage Award and for his memoir [A Place to Stand](#) the prestigious International Award. In 2006 he won the Cornelius P. Turner Award. The national award recognizes one GED graduate a year who has made outstanding contributions to society in education, justice, health, public service and social welfare.

Jimmy has devoted his post-prison life to writing and teaching others who are overcoming hardship. His themes include American Southwest barrios, addiction, injustice, education, community, love and beyond. He has conducted hundreds of writing workshops in prisons, community centers, libraries, and universities throughout the country.

In 2005 Jimmy created Cedar Tree Inc., a nonprofit foundation that works to give people of all walks of life the opportunity to become educated and improve their lives. Cedar Tree provides free instruction, books, writing material and scholarships. Cedar Tree has an ongoing writing workshop in the Albuquerque Women's Prison and at the South Valley Community Center. Cedar Tree also has an Internship program that provides live-in writing scholarships at Wind River Ranch, and in the south valley of Albuquerque. The program allows students, writers and poets the opportunity to write, attend poetry readings, conduct writing workshops, and work on documentary film production.

Jimmy is currently finishing a novel, a play and three poetry manuscripts to be published in 2007. He is also producing a two-hour documentary about the power of literature and how it can change lives.