



# Candida Rose Baptista

Interviewer:

Good morning, Candida.

Candida Rose Baptista:

Good morning.

Interviewer:

Nice to see you.

Candida Rose Baptista:

Nice to be seen.

Interviewer:

You're here this morning to share with us a story for the Common Ground Project. Your story, right?

Candida Rose Baptista:

Yes.

Interviewer:

You originally found out about this project through Akeia, who is the creator of it.

Candida Rose Baptista:

Yes.

Interviewer:

So I'm very happy that you're participating, we are, so if you'd like to start in any way, tell us about why New Bedford is important to you, or what it is that you're connecting to, that'd be great.

Candida Rose Baptista:

Oh my goodness. Just in your saying that, I'm already getting these emotions. Because I'm looking out, where I'm sitting I'm looking out over the Acushnet River, and I'm looking out over this area where I actually grew up. So of course New Bedford is my home town, born and raised. I was born not too far from where we are, so 501 Acushnet Avenue, which is right where Route 18 kind of goes through here. That's where a lot of my childhood was. I also grew up in the south end, sort of the south central area of New Bedford too, which kind of extends the south into Bay Village, and Water Street, and spent many years in Bay Village as well.

New Bedford, I went to school here. There's just so many memories. Really great memories, some not so great memories as well. This is the place, New Bedford is the place, that has made me who I am today. I am of Cape Verdean descent. My grandparents were from the Cape Verde islands. I also had the privilege and honor of being raised by people who helped me to really understand and learn about my Cape Verdean culture.

My dad, who really raised me on his own for a good part of my young life, because my mother, my biological



mother, passed away when I was only 14 months old, and so he made sure that I knew my Cape Verdean roots, and helped me to speak the language, and understand the language.

There was a woman named Sebastiana who lived in Bay Village, who took care of me for a good two to three years while my father was trying to figure out how to find ways to raise his children. I was with her, with Sebastiana, from the ages of, say, six to eight, I would say. Six to eight, six to nine. I learned a lot of Cape Verdean songs. I tell the story of being a six-year-old and remembering the song called Chapéu de Palha. I think, matter of fact, right in this room where we're at right now, I did a presentation a couple years ago and talked about Chapéu de Palha, which means straw hat. So I remember learning that, as it was sort of a first song, and learning Cape Verdean poems. This place is sort of magical for me, New Bedford, just in general. This stretch of land is just very magical for me.

Then, when I was about nine, my stepmother came from the Cape Verde islands, she came from Brava. My father, I guess, needed someone to help him with his children, especially the little girl, which is me. So she came and, because she couldn't speak any English at the time, I was the one that really had to help her with acclimating herself to the United States. So I was the one that went to the bank with her, I was the one that, in Creole it's [zumbrasa 00:04:51], so I was the one that had to straighten out everything for her. And as she came, and then my father helped her, and my father helped her family come to the United States, I was the one in the family that could speak the language and that could help everybody kind of get situated here in the United States.

There's so much to that. My stepmother still had family in Cabo Verde, so she helped me to write letters back and forth to people in Cabo Verde. When I was a little girl, we used to send those big drums, and people still do that, those big drums, they call them bidon, those big blue drums, and we would take them down to the waterfront, and they would be filled with all these clothes and all these things, supplies, and food and everything, to send back to Cabo Verde.

Because this area of New Bedford was still connected, was so connected to Cabo Verde, I felt that, and I grew up with that, and I was part of that. That's what I took with me. And when we had to move out of this area because of urban renewal back in the 70s, early 70s, I would say early to mid-70s, I never forgot the importance of this whole area in my life. We moved up to the west end, and I never forgot the importance of all of this. So even as I grew up, went to school, left New Bedford, got married, left, came back, when to California, so left, came back, moved because of my work, and then I moved to Taunton to get closer to some of the work that I had to do, left, but I'm back again, because there's a draw. There's this place that always draws me back.

There's this thing, there's this magic, there's this air, that always draws me back to this place. And this place also helped me to understand my connection to Cabo Verde, and so when I finally went to Cabo Verde for the first time, in 2006, it was my connection to Cabo Verde that helped me to feel my connection when I got there. So the connection to my ancestors, the connection to my mother, connection to my grandmother, connection to my grandfather, the connections to my ancestors. Because of the connections that I felt here, I was able to feel those connections when I went there, and really felt like I had gotten home. All of these experiences, I don't have just one story, it's just all of these experiences are the story of my life.

One of the things, I think, that Akeia wanted me to talk about, because now I am, for the last 15 years now, I am the sole proprietor, owner, of my own company, Golden Rules Music. So I've written songs in Creole for my CD that I have. Matter of fact, the first song that I wrote on that CD is called Karta Pa Nha Pai, which means "Letter to my father," and it was the first song that I attempted to write in the Creole language, to honor my dad and how much he has done for me.

And, I'm going to degrees just for a second, because of that CD, and again, being here at the whaling museum because of that CD and my friend Joan Beaubian, I was able to do some work with the whaling museum, and traveling as part of the echo program representing the whaling museum, and being able to teach Cape Verdean culture and language and music all around the country, from Hawaii to Alaska and places in between. So my upbringing has continued to help me to blossom as, I guess some people say cultural ambassador or something, I don't know if that's what to call it. But anyway, here I am. Again, we just keep coming back.



So Akeia wanted me to talk a little bit about where I am today. We all have been experiencing this pandemic over the last, now, year and a half or more, and as a songwriter, as a entrepreneur, as a cultural ambassador, as somebody who loves my culture, my people, my home, how has all of that affected me as a person who feels deeply? So last year I wrote this song, it's called Love Each Other Through. It was written as we were really getting ready to experience this pandemic, and understanding the depths, and understanding some of the, I don't know if you want to say consequences, but some of the things that the pandemic was ... That we had to experience through the pandemic, and through the height of what was happening with civil unrest.

I still saw beauty in some of the ways, particularly here in New Bedford, that people were helping each other through these times. When you talk about the staff of places like nursing homes and assisted living places, where I work, where I do most of my daytime work, when you talk about the hospital, the nurses and doctors in the hospitals, when you talk about the first responders, when you just talk about neighbors, like my neighbor who would bring me kale soup because she just wanted to make sure that I was okay, I saw a beauty, and I saw love, and I saw compassion, and I saw hope. So I found myself ... There was this mantra that kind of came to me, and it was like, we just have to love each other through this until we get to the other side. No matter what chaos is happening, no matter what craziness is happening around us, if we could just love each other through this, we'll be okay.

And again, because I'm here in New Bedford, living here, and I was walking down by the beach, and I heard this melody, and I heard these lyrics, and I just knew that I was being given a message to share with the world. So this song came through, and the chorus is just simply, "We've got to love each other through till we reach the other side. We must love each other through. Now's not the time to run and hide. Let's lift each other up in prayer, because there's always solace there. What we need to do is love each other through."

So I heard these lyrics, and because I love my city, I love my culture, I love this museum, because I'm part of the Cape Verdean exhibit that's here, the Cape Verdean advisory committee that's part of making sure that we continue to tell the story, the beautiful story, of Cape Verdeans in New Bedford, and how integrated Cape Verdeans are in the fabric of New Bedford, to be able to still be part of that story, and to be able to teach love, and be love, and sing about love ... The song actually ... I'm working on, I've got some people working on translating it into Creole so that my people can hear it. One of my goals is to be able to share this message with at least a million people worldwide.

So I guess I say all of that to say, New Bedford continues to inspire me. It continues to teach me. It continues to allow me to teach. It continues to be the place where, this is where my family is, this is my community. This is why I keep coming back, as I mentioned earlier. I mean I've gone back and forth, but I keep coming back. This is the place that keeps pulling me back, because this is the string. This is the string that keeps me connected to my ancestors, and I'm so thankful for this place, and I'm thankful for New Bedford, and I'm thankful for this opportunity to be able to share with all of you, and I hope that I've been able to say something that inspires you to continue to tell your story, no matter what it is. I love you. Thank you.