

My name is Conrado Basulto. I'm 44 years old. I was born in the eastern part of Cuba and then I moved to Havana. I came to the United States when I was 27 years old. When I joined the Cuban Military—life was good in Cuba. When you're young in Cuba you have a good time. But, once in the military they start to impose and demand things. I couldn't make the choices I wanted, so I began to ask myself questions. That's when I began feeling concerned. I tried to leave illegally a few times. The last attempt was in 1994, when the government allowed us to leave. We left on August 18<sup>th</sup>. I left with my brother and six other guys from our neighborhood. There were eight of us. We spent two days on the water. A U.S. ship picked us up, and that's how I arrived at the Guantánamo naval base. I spent nine months there. My brother spent almost a year and a half. I thought our detention was necessary. A lot of us were leaving and entering a new country so they wanted to know what kind of people they were letting in. People's true identities came out while we were detained on that base. Many people started making art but others had problems and were taken to prison. So, it was like a filter, a way to know who was entering the U.S. Like in every country, there were all types of people there, people with different concerns. But, in general, there were good people in Guantánamo that wanted to leave a country where they felt they had no future. And while there, people developed skills; some worked on wood, others would make furniture out of beds. There were art exhibits. Some took the plastic from the boxes that the food came in, melted it, and made sculptures. To me, personally, it was a good experience. I began to understand the American way of life, the demands of it, because they began to push that there, slowly, so you could be ready for the change. But, to me, it was a good experience. I began to develop myself as an artist and other painters there did the same thing. I created a gallery with the artist I represent today, Cundo Bermúdez. Guantánamo is where everything began with him. I named the gallery after him. We would have exhibits there with the work of artists detained in Guantánamo. The American guards supported us with that. When they saw that you were working on something that was positive, they would help you. I got used to Guantánamo. I got used to it. I was in my zone there—I had a gallery. People had so many profound emotions there, and artists feed their creativity from those emotions. I felt I was in a huge studio where I could create things. When I got here, the change from Cuba was a huge surprise. In Cuba you have more of a personal relationship with people and here it's more isolated. Cars everywhere. People you see don't talk to you; it was different. Yes, it was worth it. When you think about it, it all depends on your decisions. And your decisions are what make your future. It was worth jumping in the ocean, it was worth the risk of leaving a place that has no future and finding yourself in a place that welcomes you and gives you a chance to develop yourself as a person. It was worth it, the sacrifice was worth it. Going through Guantánamo to have a new life. I have three children that were born in this country and I am very happy here. It feels like my new home, and I love it as much as I love Cuba.