

*Peace Drum Project*  
*The Elders' Stories*  
**2010**

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## Introduction

This year, we celebrate the *tenth year* of *The Peace Drum Project*. With this accomplishment in mind, we considered how to emphasize the Arts-as-a-career for our teen participants, and how to connect them more deeply with artists living and working in this community. So, this year's stories feature the life experiences of many of the visiting artists that the teens have worked with in recent years in *The Peace Drum Project*. These stories bring to life the accomplishments of the older artists in our midst, and they serve to inspire the teens to seriously consider how a career — a life — in the Arts would be for them. Each story is inspiring in its own way, and together as a collection, they illustrate the tremendous variety of talents, cultural experiences, creativity, and spiritual authenticity of the Arts and artists in our community.

Today, as our young people look forward to the future, they feel great anxiety about their ability to succeed in such difficult economic times. The stories of these elder artists are full of wisdom about surviving tough times and overcoming life's sometimes-painful lessons. They illustrate how one can turn these unsettling or difficult experiences into creative and healing work by being open to new ideas and 'thinking outside the box.' They also remind the teens that learning is a life-long endeavor, and that the desire to grow and learn comes from *within you*, not just from parents, teachers and mentors. At least half of the artists featured in these stories attended the Boston Public Schools — some of the very schools attended by the teens — which further bridges the gap about who can "*make it in the Arts*," and what it takes to become a successful artist in our culture.

The *words of wisdom* found within these stories echo the advice and guidance of elders from previous years, emphasizing hard work, openness to opportunities, and the importance of friends and family in giving birth to dreams and self-

esteem. While some families **did not** want their child to ‘*suffer the life of an artist,*’ or thought it could not be a financially viable career, there were adults in almost every story who fueled and supported the dreams of the artists when they were young. There was always someone—a grandfather, a friend, a sister, a teacher, saying, ‘*Don’t give up on your dreams.*’

This is why we believe that *The Peace Drum Project* is so important for the social, educational and personal development these youth. Even when they sometimes don’t understand how this *immersion in the Arts* is changing them, the teens’ evaluations and self-assessments clearly show that these experiences are inspiring new ideas and more open minds, expanding positive friendships, reinforcing the courage to take artistic risks, developing their abilities to solve problems differently, and supporting their efforts to stay in school.

A very high percentage (97%) of participating teens in recent years have graduated from high school and have gone on to college or community college. Many of them have stayed in touch with their elder partners, and the elders have followed their young partners progress in school and afterwards. We believe that this partnership between young and old through stories offers a powerful model for engaging young people with elders in a positive and meaningful way. *The Peace Drum Project* deepens the connections between youth and elders, and it builds understanding and greater support for each group within the larger community. In evaluations each year, the youth themselves rank their time with the elders as one of their favorite activities of the project.

We are inspired by the lives of the artists that we have worked with this year. Many of them have come from early lives of poverty and racial discrimination, and some have experienced multiple hardships. Some have raised families under difficult circumstances and have lost children before their time. Yet, they are all full of warmth, humor, optimism, generosity, and hope for the future. Their

resilience is not only inspiring, but provides a road map for our teens who have this priceless opportunity to connect with them, learn from their experiences, and honor their wisdom. We regret that we could only scratch the surface of their stories in our interviews. These stories just whet our appetite to know more about these interesting and creative spirits who have taken this year's teens on a journey through the last sixty years from Boston to Japan, Sudan, Tennessee, the Midwest and more. We hope that you will also be inspired by these wonderful stories.

We are most appreciative to all of the elders who were willing to share their experiences and knowledge with the teens this year. Their stories provide a bridge between the generations, and create common ground that helps to build a stronger community for us all. Young people today need more opportunities to work with elders because their stories teach us that peace is not randomly found. It is built through patience, caring about your community, and hard work. Many hopes, dreams, and challenges remain constant across generations, and knowing that others have faced similar obstacles, and have overcome them, gives power to youthful dreams and aspirations.

The teens who took part in producing these stories include: Livymer Caceres, Nancy Cardona, Merilin Castillo, Rogenzo Cruickshank, Jasmine Dozier, Abdiel Fonseca, Jessica Harris, Shannon Hills, Marjourie Jimenez, Ivan Richiez, Johniesha Smith, and Erys Valdez. We thank them for their respectful manner, lively energy, and curious questioning. The teens also received great support from Peace Drum Interns who traveled with them to the various artists' studios and helped with the interviews. These interns include: Prema Bangera, Emily Cobb, Susanna Derby, Eric Robinson, and Chris Watson. Courtney Williams provided fundraising and promotions support.

Thanks to Julia Martin for her ongoing support of the project and for her help in providing space for activities. Thanks to AAMARP Studios for hosting the teens

on several occasions. We extend special thanks to two artists— Susan Thompson and Curtis Jones —who were both visiting artists *and* elder artist participants with us this year! Susan and Curtis worked with elders and the teens during the year, and were also willing to share their stories with us.

We dedicate these stories in memory of Charles M. Holley (1937-2006), creator of *The Peace Drum Project* and Co-founder of Cooperative Artists Institute. He is greatly missed by the many project graduates, elders, and artists who knew and worked with him over the years.

Susan E. Porter, Director

The Peace Drum Project

[http://www.tribal-rhythms.org/drum\\_exhibit.html](http://www.tribal-rhythms.org/drum_exhibit.html)



## **Hakim Raquib**

**Interviewed by Rogenzo Cruickshank, Ivan Richiez, and Erys Valdez**

My name is Hakim Raquib. I was born in Cologne, Panama in 1946. My mother, Angelina Innocente, was from Guadelupe, and my father, Eton Wilson, was from Jamaica. So, they met in Panama and had my brother and I. Then, for the purposes of education, they decided to come to the United States. So, I grew up here because my family migrated to Boston when I was 5 years old.

My older brother, Eton, was named after my father. My younger brother's name was Ricardo Wilson. My father named him after one of the presidents of Panama. I grew up pretty much with my mother and father, and my two brothers. I was the middle child. My brothers are both deceased now. My mother worked at the Lemuel Shattuck Hospital as a nurses' aide, then she worked in the Spanish bilingual program in the Boston school system before she retired. My father was a contractor. Although my parents were separated early in my life, my father was always around and if I didn't do well, he knew about it. He was always a force to reckon with, bless his heart! They're both deceased now, too.

My great grandmother was in this country when we moved here, but she passed away a few months after. I was only 5 years old, so I did meet her, and I went to her funeral. But, I used to see my grandmother all the time because she lived right around the corner from us. I was always running errands for her. She had migrated here from Jamaica in the forties. She was actually a seamstress when she came here, so that's how she made her living. Then, when she retired from that, she worked in real estate — she managed a couple of houses. She always

owned her own home, but then she bought a couple of houses. I don't know how she managed that! That's about all the detail that I have.

When we first came to this country, we moved two or three times before we settled on Faison Street which is off of Blue Hill Ave. near Quincy Street. I grew up in a small family, but in the house where we lived, there was also another family that we lived with for years. They had their apartment and we had our apartment, and we shared the basement, but we were all culturally linked. So, I grew up in a real tight family atmosphere. I've had some of the same friends from here since I was 9 years old. And even though I've moved around a bit, we stayed in contact, so I guess I'm lucky. One of them was my best man, and I was his best man. All you need is one good friend.

Although I had no sisters, I had girl friends who were very influential in helping me to understand that part of my behavior. They taught me how to dance. See, when you don't have a sister to help with that social piece, you have to go out and get it, you know? Sometimes you need that immediate feedback. Your mother or father's concept of 'what it is' just doesn't do it, because they do *the old* things and you want to learn about *the new* things.

Growing up here in this area: Roxbury, Dorchester, and Jamaica Plain, was great for me. There were many different cultures living here together back in the early fifties. I still live in my old neighborhood, but it's changed quite a bit.

I attended the public schools in Boston and graduated from Boston English High School. My high school days were pretty much filled with sports. I would have been what you'd call a "jock." I ran track and played football. I was also into intramural sports and played City League basketball, which was a really

good thing because I met a lot of great guys there outside of my high school. Back then, English High was on the Avenue Louis Pasteur in the Fenway over near Simmons and Emmanuel College. Boston Latin used to be across the street from Boston English at that time.

So I grew up –I don't know how to explain it – I had a great normal childhood. We dressed up and wore ties to school. When we dated we wore ties. We were always clean and presentable— tight. It was part of the way we were educated at that time, to be a gentleman, and to treat people with courtesy and respect. If you did something wrong on the way home on the bus, by the time you got home, your mother already knew about it! The community was very closely linked. There was always somebody on the bus who knew your mother, or knew who you were. So you always had to watch yourself. It wasn't like paranoia or anything, it's just the way it was — you had to be respectful.

Some kids now are a little disrespectful. I feel bad because there are a lot of kids who need some coaching in better behavior. I don't want to make it sound prejudiced, but I grew up in a household that was not so much American as it was Caribbean. Because my father's Jamaican and my mother's from the French West Indies, they made sure that when we went out there, we represented well, if you follow that thought!

The most important thing I learned from my family when I was growing up was self-respect. My mother would always say, and my father would always tag in: *“If you don't respect yourself, no one will respect you.”* That comes first, and I think they were right. Those are words of wisdom to pass on: Yes, respect yourself and others will respect you. Be proud of your heritage, your ancestry. Don't try to be anyone but yourself, and try to be better as a human being. I

think those things are important, because anything else will float if you have that. If you have self-respect, the power in that knowledge of self, and where you come from, then nothing can change that.

You know, some people sell out to their addictions, and they lose themselves in this drug-infested environment, then they're gone. They never return to the self. Common sense is fundamental. So, I think my mother and my father always felt that self-respect was the key to your success, and putting an education with that, too. It doesn't matter if you want to be an artist, a biologist, a lawyer — try to be the best at what you choose to be. It doesn't matter as long as you're into the well being of helping self, family, and community.

There were a lot of things that I learned from my parents, but that was the essence of what helped me to look at things in a broader way. Once you have that respect, it gives you confidence. It allows you to breathe easier because you know you're competent. That's important. It's one of the fundamental lessons you need to excel within your life. Without it, you lose your ability to cope. You have to have self-esteem, because the lack of it can do terrible things in your life. So those are some very important things to remember.

My friends when I was young? Well my best friend, Phillip, is a couple of years older than I am. He was actually my older brother's friend, but then he and I started to hang around together. He was influential in my looking toward higher goals, because I admired him — the way he carried himself, the way he dressed. So we're still very good friends now. In fact, I was his Best Man at both of his weddings, and he was my Best Man. He's a librarian and he studied history, and now he's getting ready to retire.

It was fun when I was young. What can I tell you about my best friend? He's just a character. When we were young we went to school together, we chased the girls and we partied together. Then he went away to school, and then he went to war. When he came back we became 'hippies' together. We were always doing something together. Now that we're older we don't see each other as much because we're both busy, but we play tennis together. Sometimes we'd go to sporting events and clubs. I think the best thing we used to do together was have long conversations about our lives, about our situations. I think the best thing is that we talk about a whole range of topics, ideas, concepts, not just our day-to-day lives. So our relationship is based on conversation and enjoying each other's company. We get together with our wives and go out together, sometimes to dinner, or maybe a concert.

Did my parents have rules? OH YES. Oh yes, I would get in trouble all the time. My brother Eton was older, so he was suppose to be responsible for me when we left the house together. He had his group of friends and I had my group of friends, but since we left together, we had to return together — that was the thing with my mother. But I always had him waiting on the stairs for me, and he would be angry! He figured if he came in without me, he'd get a whipping, and if he came in with me and we were late, he'd get a whipping. So he was going to get one anyway. Then, when I was about 15 or 16, I began to honor the code, and be home at 12. Then when the curfew was off, I would always be home at 12 anyhow

What were my dreams at your age? Well I think I was still busy trying to figure out what I wanted to do when I was your age. All I really knew was that I wanted to go to college, have money in my pocket, have nice clothes, and

things like that. When I got older and went to college, I got more involved with political and civil rights activities, and it caused an expansion of my identity so to speak. When you get older you change.

So, when I was about 28, I stopped partying and hanging out. We just stopped going to clubs and things. I think we discovered that there was nothing out there. So if you have a girlfriend, you tend to do things with her, so your not out there chasing. You've mellowed out. What changes? That's a good question. Well, after I got out of school, I was trying to find my way as to exactly what I was going to do. Maybe it had to do with making a commitment to being an artist and to my career, but I didn't realize it then.

I went to three schools, actually. I had been at the University of Wyoming on a football scholarship but I dropped it because I couldn't cut it. There was a lot of racism at the UW, where the only people of color there were athletes. Then I graduated from Fiske University in Nashville, Tennessee, which is an all Black institution. Then later, I went to study at MIT under a Mellon Foundation grant. That's where I started my photographic career. I studied photography at a program established at MIT's *Center for Advanced Visual Studies* called the *Roxbury Photographers Training Program*. But now, I feel that my education is ongoing because I'm always going to school somewhere, and I'm studying all of the time.

What was the scariest thing that ever happened to me? Well, I think it was being arrested for a crime that I did not commit. I was literally kidnapped in Newport, RI for being in a community that was not accustomed to having people of color. I was actually attending a party, and was walking a friend to her car. When I was on my way back I was approached by a plain-clothes

policeman, maced, and woke up in jail. I was escorting her to her car because it was late at night and I was being a gentleman. So that was one of the scariest things in my life.

Another time, when I was in college, as a student activist, our quarters were invaded by police with shotguns. We were suspected of being terrorists. This was during the civil rights movement, and they wanted to break up student organizing. So that was another potentially life-threatening situation, because when you're in a situation like that, if one makes the wrong move, it could be dangerous. I had thought of going under my bed to get my shoes, but thought again, because I realized they could have thought it was something else. So, those were a couple of scary things I can think of now.

The times during the Civil Rights Movement are difficult to reflect on. They're important because they shaped me as a man, and they shaped my identity in terms of equal rights and human rights. I participated in the movement to help others recognize their power and their voice in the vote. That's where I was at. So I joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) when I was going to school in Nashville. We would go to various small towns around Selma, Alabama where they needed help coordinating the community to vote. People were afraid because of the racism, so that was where I felt my personal power in becoming a man – to be able to help other people gain the dignity to vote.

So during that time, a critical issue in my life was to stay alive, because once you involved yourself in these types of political activities, you were looked upon as a troublemaker, at least in the South. I was arrested on some bogus charges — they called it 'insurrection to the state' — which was ridiculous. So,

a trial went on, and we were found not guilty. But this was one of the tactics they used to disrupt the civil rights cause. At one point a gun was put to my head, so that made me realize how careful you have to be when you take action. In the end though, the success is always in people realizing their power and gaining more control over their lives. That's the greatest reward in having been part of the movement.

After I got out of school, I was working as a professional photographer in advertising; I was doing a lot of educational stuff as well. I think I got hooked on photography because I could get paid for doing it and I was good at it. That might have been part of the motivation, but the art, and the love of doing photography was always there in my adult life. There were times when I was young that I wish I had a camera because I missed a lot of good stuff! But I didn't see the value then of capturing things for historical reasons. I think that I found my voice as a storyteller through images.

I love music, and my uncle loved music too, so when I was a teenager, he used to take me to The Jazz Workshop. It was a music club down on Boylston Street but it's no longer there. I was underage, so I shouldn't have been there, but I was tall so I could pass for older. We used to see some of the greatest musicians in the world there. If I had a camera back then I would have captured some of them on film, but now that time is gone. John Coltrane, who I love, he was a tremendous musician. I heard him there, but I don't have an image of him that I made.

So, for things like that, I wish I had a camera back then, but I think I was always capturing images in my mind, so the camera was a natural extension of how I see things. Of course, now the camera has transformed itself through the

computer in some ways. So, I still make photographs, I just don't make them for the same end purpose. I'm always looking at something in a way to transform it. So, that's what I'm working on right now — to transform something and find what else is there.

After I got out of school, my social activities changed, and my civil rights perspective changed, and, I also got interested in Islam. So I started studying and becoming more spiritual at that point in my life. That was pretty much a change in my twenties. Islam came into my life, and a lot of things changed including my relationships.

Yes, my name is Arabic, and it comes from a ceremony you go through on becoming a Muslim. The ceremony is called a shahada, and that is where you undergo your transformation, so to speak, and take on an identity of a Muslim. All names are attributes of God, so you are given a name that best fits you. And, truly, how to look at my name is Abdur, 'being the servant of Allah.' So, Hakim means "the wise" — in some cultures it means "doctor", and Raquib means "the observer" or "the watchful."

Islam is pretty much like any religion, it has prophets and rules but mainly in Islam, the guide is the person of Mohammed, who was the founder of Islam. So essentially, it's a way of life. You pray 5 times a day and you give alms to the poor. There are many different sects of Islam; I'm a Sunni Muslim, and I practice the Sunnah. We have the Koran, like Christians' have the Bible and Jews have the Torah. These books act like a guide to help you learn that there are certain things that you do and don't do based on the beliefs of the religion. It's very simple.

So, around that time, I was inspired to leave my job and join the Roxbury Photographers Training Program. I met some great photographers in that school. Well, you know, I had an interest in art, but there were a lot of things going on in my life at that time, so it's difficult to say there was one thing that caused me to move. But, I was still searching. I was well involved in photography by then, and the opportunity came along and I just took hold. There was a strong motivation in me because I was always seeking to define my space, where I was with things that were going on, and photography seemed like a good way of doing it.

So, my career took off after that. Of course, there were many moves that were made. I didn't initially go out there and start making big money! I was first selling my work to people doing weddings, and things like that. Then I started working for educational publications around the country having my work used for illustrations. But, finally I took the big leap because I needed the money, and I opened up a photography studio. I had to use everything that I had, *and* I got a small business loan. I did that for ten years or maybe more, and made a lot of money. Then I stopped doing that and I moved to California. I got tired of that after four years and came back to New York where I hung out and worked there for 'a minute.' I did advertising, editorial photography, fashion, things like that.

Then I decided to move back home. So I worked here and I was a contract photographer for Mass. Transitional Assistance Program— welfare, downtown. I worked there for about 5 years, then I just stopped and started thinking '*what do I want to do with my life?*' You know, I had traveled a lot in between things, and I thought about it, so I became an artist. I've always been a photographer

and I pretty much worked for myself, so that was good. I've always been kind of a loner, and even now, the only person that I work with is my wife, Maddu —she's a painter. So, to answer your question, my favorite job is photography!

The people that I've most admired in my life were my mother and my father. Without them, I wouldn't be the person that I am, and I think I'm OK. But as far as people who have influenced my work, Gordon Parks and Rudy de Carava, stand out as people whose work I appreciate, and Irving Penn. They stand out as influences in my work. I've adapted to so many different styles over the years, and now I pretty much have my own style. But I admired them because of their strength of conviction to their work— and discipline. Also, because of the versatility that they had—they could shoot *anything*. Some photographers only specialize in one thing like food, or fashion, or architecture. But they could do it all, and could do it well.

Rudy de Carava captured the subtleties of African American culture —of the common man —from his perspective, but his work had universal appeal. His style was just unmistakable, and his photographs were simple, but beautiful.

Irving Penn was an icon in the fashion industry. He worked for Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. His style was so clean and pinpoint clear, and he brought the reality right at you — POW! But he also explored Native People, and he would go around photographing iterant people all over the place in their working styles and uniforms. He had a vast repertoire.

Gordon Parks was a renaissance man — he did everything, film, photography, music, and painting. He was one to say "*Hey, I can go here, I can do this.*" And he did this at a time in this country when that wasn't possible. Everything was

very closed, but he opened doors. So, they were all people whose work I admired.

My biggest adventure? I guess it was when I had an assignment with OxFam America, and went to Africa for a month in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. That was an amazing experience! It was 6 years after Zambia and Zimbabwe won their independence. But I think discovering the great ruins of Zimbabwe was part of that experience because it was seeing the granary architecture of Africa with my own eyes. It was over 1000 years old, still standing for me to photograph. When I saw the ruins, I thought, "*Why haven't I known about these structures before? Why was I unaware of the fact that these were built by Black people?*"

They were built with their own hands without mortar. Do know how hard it is for something to be built without mortar; it's conical and keeps its shape and integrity for 1000 years? I thought that was amazing! These ruins in Zimbabwe were the cornerstones of my career that brought me more into the realm of creating Art. So I think the adventure was discovering that, but this was also my first time on the African continent. To understand that — know where you come from — to experience that is amazing.

I've exhibited that work, and my photographs are in the collection of the National Center for African American Art over on Walnut Ave. I've exhibited in a few other places as well. When I came to AAMARP I was doing one kind of work, and now I'm doing something completely different. Each year you have to submit what your activities have been to Northeastern University in terms of helping the community to understand art, or understand its identity or its culture. This residency is a process because of the influence of my

colleagues, and the opportunity that AAMARP gives you to spring to another level.

Overall, I feel very fortunate to be here. There are probably a lot of other artists who would love to be in this position, to have a space to work in, and not to have to worry about a lot of things. Paying for a studio can cost a lot of money, so that's a worry that many artists struggle with because you're usually not employed all of the time. Some of the artists here teach, and I've done teaching in high school. But, most artists just want to do their art because that's your real profession. So I think of AAMARP as a contribution to my development and career.

The happiest moment of my life? See everything has to be in a certain time, because there are steps and stages in life. But I guess it was watching my daughter's birth. Seeing her come into this world was the most exhilarating experience I've ever had. It was to see *her* come into this world. It's a feeling of elation that I will never forget, and you can't describe. I don't think there is any drug that could make a person feel that alive! I've made great discoveries in my work that have given me great feelings of elation, but I think that was the happiest moment I can think of now.

And I got a lot of joy spending time with my mother during the last three months of her life, because I got to know her all over again. Not as my mother, but as another human being that has been in my life, and who knew me better than I knew myself. And for her to reveal that in her life was big too. It's a different kind of joy from seeing my daughter being born, but it's a joy too. It's kind of a contradiction. I guess it's because we all die, but it's significant *how* we die.

You know, you got me thinking more about what is meaningful in this part of life, and what was the most eventful thing in my life as an artist. So, I had to go back and think about it, and I realized it was the Million Man March. It brought me to another level of understanding of the meaning of being an African-American male in this society. You know, what claims were being made about us by others.

I went to the march *out of the blue*. It was midnight when I left, and it was all a beautiful experience. Once we got there, you saw brothers from all walks of life. You could tell by the look— the dress — there were military men, businessmen, educators, politicians, artists, and every kind of person. It was a wonderful experience, and your question made me think about it again. So I'm going to go back into my archives and pull that material out and do a piece. It will be different than it would have been if I did it then, because I have a different mindset now.

I want to thank you for the questions that you asked. This was good because you made me think about things that I hadn't thought about in a while, and I probably won't have the opportunity to do this again. I appreciate you guys coming through and doing this with me. It's good what you're doing, because I can impart some of what I know as an artist. That's' how it works! You know, sometimes you need someone to poke you to get back to something. There were several experiences that you helped me recall, but that one really came back. So maybe in a couple of months I'll be able to show you that piece!

The thing that I forgot to say is that 'time flies,' but the process of education is long, and it never stops. Beyond the paper, getting the degree, education never

stops. Always keep in the flow of that, because you may be sitting on the other side of the questions before you know it. This is the oral tradition, so pass the baton, and know that your experience can help others in the future to learn something that they may really need to know.

What I try to do is to stay mentally aware, to know what's going on, always. I listen to the news, I listen to young people like you. I get ideas from young people, even though I'm older than you. Because young people are on the cutting edge of *what's going to be*. And really, life is perseverance and hard work. Nothing comes easy, especially as you get older. But what does become easier as you get older is *how* you live. You should at least carry your mind more peacefully. You understand things better, so it's easier to prioritize what's important, what you want to do, so you can relax. That only comes with experience. Everyone makes mistakes, but as you get older you want to try not to make too many mistakes because they cost you. Also, your health is essential to do anything else you want to do. You have to believe in something higher than yourself, always believe in something that you can gather your strength from.