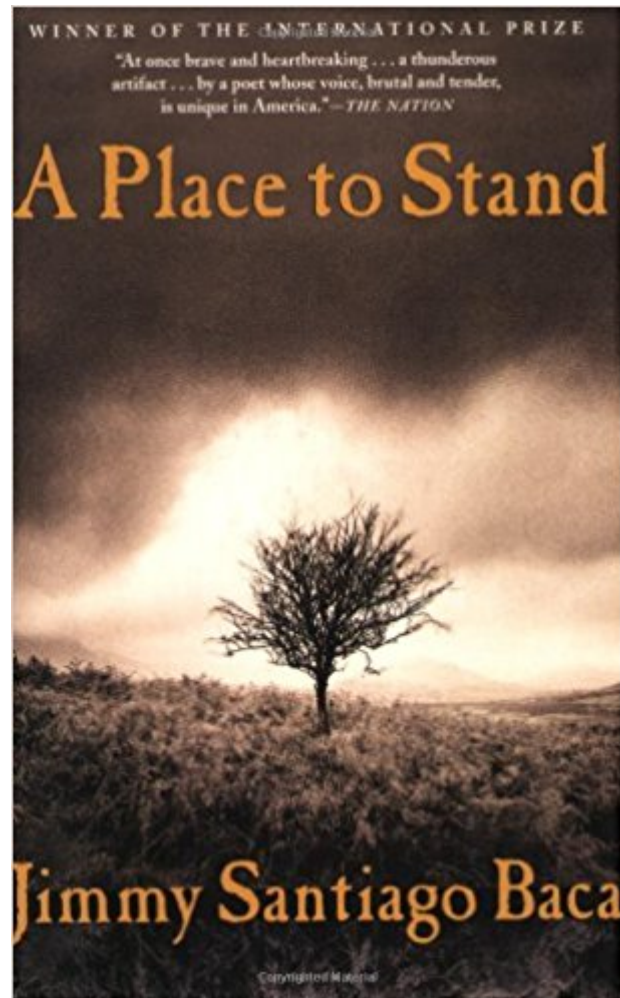




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# A Place To Stand



## Synopsis

Jimmy Santiago Baca's harrowing, brilliant memoir of his life before, during, and immediately after the years he spent in a maximum-security prison garnered tremendous critical acclaim and went on to win the prestigious 2001 International Prize. Long considered one of the best poets in America today, Baca was illiterate at the age of twenty-one and facing five to ten years behind bars for selling drugs. *A Place to Stand* is the remarkable tale of how he emerged after his years in the penitentiary -- much of it spent in isolation -- with the ability to read and a passion for writing poetry. A vivid portrait of life inside a maximum-security prison and an affirmation of one man's spirit in overcoming the most brutal adversity, *A Place to Stand* "stands as proof there is always hope in even the most desperate lives" -- (Fort Worth Morning Star-Telegram). "A Place to Stand is a hell of a book, quite literally. You won't soon forget it." -- Luis Urrea, The San Diego Union-Tribune "This book will have a permanent place in American letters." -- Jim Harrison

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone who doubts the power of the written word to transform a life will know better after reading poet Jimmy Santiago Baca's wrenching memoir of his troubled youth and the five-year jail stint that turned him around. When he enters New Mexico's Florence State Prison in 1973, convicted on a drug charge, Baca is 21 and has a long history of trouble with the law. There's no reason to think jail will do anything but turn him into a hardened criminal, and standing up for himself with guards and menacing fellow cons quickly gains him a reputation as a troublemaker. But there have already been hints that this turbulent young man is looking for a way out, as he painstakingly spells out a

poem from a clerk's college textbook while awaiting trial or unsuccessfully tries to get permission to take classes in prison. When a volunteer from a religious group sends him a letter, contact with the written word unleashes something in Baca, who starts writing letters and poems with the aid of a dictionary. Reading literature shows him possibilities for understanding his painful family background and expressing his feelings. Poetry literally saves him from being a murderer, as Baca stands over another convict with an illegal weapon, ready to finish him off, and hears "the voices of Neruda and Lorca... praising life as sacred and challenging me: How can you kill and still be a poet?" Baca has a year to go on his sentence, but the reader knows at that point he has made a choice that will alter his destiny. Without softening the brutality of life in jail, Baca expresses great tenderness for the men there who helped him and affirms his commitment to writing poetry for them, "telling the truth about the life that prisoners have to endure." --Wendy Smith --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

While readers may find Baca's poetry more dazzling than this prose memoir about how he became a poet, the author still manages to capture both the reader's interest and sympathies. Baca traverses his life, starting with his childhood in rural New Mexico where both parents essentially abandoned him his adolescence in "juvee" halls and his days as a drug dealer. The story leads up to an account of five years in a maximum-security prison in Arizona, and the unusual personal transformation that occurs there through his learning to read and write; eventually, he discovers his poetic voice. The text is structured like a conversion narrative in which Baca's past symbolizes all that is unhealthy and his poetry-oriented future is filled with the hope and optimism that come from discovering something divine in the midst of darkness. The darkness is often literal, as when Baca is describing his lengthy solitary confinements. He also recounts the intricacies of prison politics, in which failure to gain respect and alliances forged with the wrong people can mean death. Oddly, certain story lines are simply dropped along the way, such as his charge that the prison was lacing his food with strong psychoactive drugs. It is too bad that Baca's prose is frequently flat ("Poetry enhanced my self-respect. It provided me with a path for exploring possibilities for life's enrichment that I follow to this day"), especially when reflecting upon abstract topics, since the content of his story is so interesting and his poetry simply shines. (July) Forecast: Baca has won a Pushcart Prize, among other awards, including his title as a one-time champion of the International Poetry Slam. A 12-city tour will win him fans and sell more books. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I liked everything about this book. The poems, the truths and the sacred Darkness brought to light -thru no fault of his own (in spite of himself and his life's path)- AND because (of himself and his soul-listening) he woke to actualize his own soul. George Gurdjieff states that Man has a soul, but is sleeping about it. That it takes real awakening, conscious effort, to realize our soul... we need to actualize it. Otherwise, we are just taking it for granted that it is alive, and functioning in this world - and in fact, that is just a hope, a dream. Until we go consciously within - however that path might be - and be response-able to wake ourselves from the nightmare/dreaming we sleep-walk around in, we are soul-less. When we breakthrough this thick layer of shadow, consciously, as seekers, as listeners to the compelling, as stewards of the Mystery calling, then we wake. And soul is actualized. I luv that Mr. Baca experiences this. I say experiences, because once you do, it is never just some event in the past... but is that and always a present knowing. A presence of Self. I would love to exchange poems with him. I have put this book as required reading on my syllabus... As an artist and a depth psychologist, meditation therapist and educator, I sense that Mr. Santiago Baca and I know each other in that reality of a miraculous light we owe our lives to. Though we have gotten here by utterly opposite paths. Which points out that the Soul Does Not Separate us... though the world might. Thank you for this gift of your story and your SoulSong Mr. Baca... Satya Keyes

I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Baca on a recent US flight. I read his book and was very touched with his honesty and story telling ability. Such a difficult beginning for him and yet he has persevered, managed to beat the odds and is a delight to visit with. I feel very honored to have been able to spend time with him and to learn more about his life's journey.

I had to read this book for my writing class. At first when I read what it was about I thought I was going to be bored. Then I read it...and it is a great book. I was able to write the paper that I needed to with no problems. Jimmy had endured a lot and it is amazing to hear his story and how he changed his life.

A true story of struggle, hardship, and survival. This book is a must read for anyone to understand what it is like to be Chicano, poor, and oppressed. Poverty affects everyone but when you are a minority, the battle is more intense. We have many Black people survive oppression and slavery but the public is unaware of the struggle of the Chicano people and how their land was taken away from them. "A Place to Stand," is just one story of just one Chicano that experienced life in prison and the very sad ending of losing his family forever. Jimmy Santiago Baca describes his life living in an

orphanage and how ending up in prison affected his life. This book is a must read for anyone who is interested in biographies.

I loved this hopeful and at times tragic story of a young man who although suffered so much loss and experienced so much injustice and abuse at such a young age manages to teach himself to read and write while in prison. Loved his poetry. Baca reminds us that as humans we are resilient and can do much with words. Strongly recommend this book

A wonderfully authentic and poignant voice sharing an intensely personal yet American story.

This is one of the most remarkable narratives from someone who has endured what we in society do to people. Your achievement does not only lie in survival, but in your spontaneous way of using every form of damage to grow. This book is inspirational to human beings.

I had to read this for a class, but as it turns out, I really enjoyed it. It opened my eyes to the world of Arizona's Florence prison, as well as the lifestyle associated with people on both sides of the barbed wire fence.

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