

# The Liberation of Zulayka

By Judy Hogan

Zulayka Santiago had never driven a bus, worked in food service, or gone into business for herself. She was living in Durham and couldn't find a source of fresh-pressed juices. In July 2008 she had the idea of selling juices.

## WOMEN OF CHATHAM

She consulted small business workshop leaders at Durham Tech and worked out a

business plan. At first she investigated opening a shop. But retail space was expensive.

She decided to go mobile and learned of a remodeled ice cream truck that did something similar in Brooklyn. She developed a menu, talked to other entrepreneurs, including Jerry of Ben and Jerry's. She found a place in Raleigh, Ice Cream Trucks, USA, that converted ice cream trucks, but she wanted to use bio-diesel and needed a diesel vehicle. The shop happened to have a small school bus, and she was able to get a loan from the N.C. Rural Center. Then the shop converted it for her. She needed a built-in a freezer, refrigerator, counter and storage space, a hand sink, plus a generator to run the juicer, freezer, and refrigerator.

She introduced her turquoise, colorfully decorated bus here on July 4 and sold her first juices and smoothies (all vegan except for the honey) for the first time at Chatham Marketplace on July 16. The bus and its bright colors are the perfect backdrop for the cheerful, womanly flower that is Zulayka.

She was born in Puerto Rico. Her family moved to New Orleans when she was 6, so all her schooling has been here. She first lived in Chatham in the Sara Lyn community in 2005. She next spent some years in Durham and has worked for several non-profits, including the N.C. Peoples' Coalition for Giving. She sees her Liberacion Juice Station as a way of building community. Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr.'s mentor, Howard Thurman, she believes in doing what you love. "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do that." She also loves the book *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, who writes about "following your personal legend." "We should do work that brings us alive," she says, "and follow our legend with all of our heart."

Zulayka had to overcome many difficulties. She has had to replace her



Zulayka Sanitago and her magic bus.

PHOTO BY JOHN SHILLITO

generator twice. Gradually she learned which venues work best, and now she plans appearances where there are crowds. She goes regularly to the Durham Farmers' market Saturday mornings, to Pittsboro's First Sunday festivities, and weekly to Chatham Marketplace on Fridays, from 4-7 p.m. The bus will run through mid-November and then be available for special events during the winter.

"It has been a sharp learning curve," she said. She took many risks to bring her bus to birth, but so far she is breaking even. She still does her non-profit work part-time. She returned to Chatham because she missed the woods and the natural

world. She didn't want to live her life thinking, "What if?"

Her smoothies and cold drinks are wild, healthy, and delicious. The signature smoothie, Green Liberation, has kale, prunes, ginger, flax, apple juice. She invented the Fig-o-Licious with fresh figs, almonds, and ground ginger. The Thunderbunny elixir has fresh-pressed carrots, beets, and ginger in it. Hibiscus iced tea is spiced with fresh ginger. She uses orange and apple

juice and almond milk, buys fruit from Eastern Carolina Organics. She had 100 percent watermelon juice and also Muscadine juice from fresh grapes this summer. Her drinks cost from \$2-\$5.

The bus is equipped with red awnings. Why? "Wings, because it's a magic bus," she says, "and for shade." Hula hoops are available for young and old. Speakers provide music.

Her hobby is dancing, and she and a friend organized dance jams that happen every other month at Pittsboro's Community House on East Thompson St, alcohol and smoke-free, all ages welcome. The next dance is Saturday, November 7, 7-10 p.m.

Recently Zulayka and her bus appeared on WUNC-TV's "North Carolina Now."

Zulayka's enthusiasm for her work radiates from her. "We spend so much of our life working. We might as well enjoy what we do." She likes Chatham but wishes there were more integration of people of color in organic/sustainability circles. Her advice to others is to do what makes you feel alive and don't be afraid to ask for help.

*Judy Hogan is a poet, creative writing teacher, and small sustainable farmer who lives in Moncure. judyhogan@mindspring.com*

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