

# Steve Spencer

## *A Big Brazilian Heart*

by David de Hilster photo Billy Arquimimo

One of the biggest Brazilian hearts in all of California has passed on as Steve Spencer left us at the age of 60 due to complications arising from pulmonary fibrosis. There was virtually no one in the Brazilian community he didn't touch - his heart was as big as the body that held it, and he greeted everyone with a smile, a hug, and a hearty "Tudo bem?" (how are you?) He offered comfort to friends and family who suffered as his condition deteriorated. He passed away December 15, 2008, in the presence of friends and family praying and singing his favorite music, Mocidade's "Explode Coração."

Steve was the heart of the Brazilian community in San Diego; he loved Brazil as much as Brazilians themselves and frequently traveled there in order to bringing musical acts to Southern California. One of his favorite trips was when he went as a bodyguard for Mr. M.; he met Brazilian celebrities such as Xuxa and made numerous friends. During his life he helped establish the Brazilian Carnaval and various club nights as staples in San Diego, paving the way for growth and recognition of its Brazilian community.

Steve's contributions will be missed not only in California, but around the world. His legacy of spreading Brazilian cheer covers Africa, the Americas, and then some - his close friend Christine said it best: "He blended in wherever he went."

Among those who received his support were the SambaLá Samba School and Long Beach Brazilian Street Carnaval. I invited him to our Carnaval this year, but

during our melancholic conversations it was evident he felt the end was near. He said, "David, you know I will be there in spirit even if my body can't make it." It was hard to hear, but I knew he was there with us that day.

For more than a decade, Steve and I shared a special camaraderie as non-Brazilians in love with Brazil. *Gringos* like Steve and I are often targeted for criticism from those who think we do what we do to exploit the name and culture of Brazil. Others simply don't like the fact that gringos are the ones promoting their culture. We knew this was not true given the time, money, and sweat we poured into our adopted Brazilian culture; we always laughed at people who thought we made money at this. We both lived on the compliments we received from Brazilians and Americans who thanked us for keeping their culture alive in the States. We tried to give back what Brazil gave to us.

Steve, I will miss you and your conversations. San Diego will miss your presence at this year's Carnaval Ball. Most of all, we'll miss that big bear hug and "Tudo Bem?" you gave everyone you met. We have lost a friend and a beautiful soul here on earth, but somewhere others have gained the biggest heart the Brazilian community has ever known.

Steve "Baiano" Spencer will at last be rightfully accepted as a true citizen of Brazil, for in heaven they don't look at your passport but rather what is inside your heart.

*Saudades* my friend