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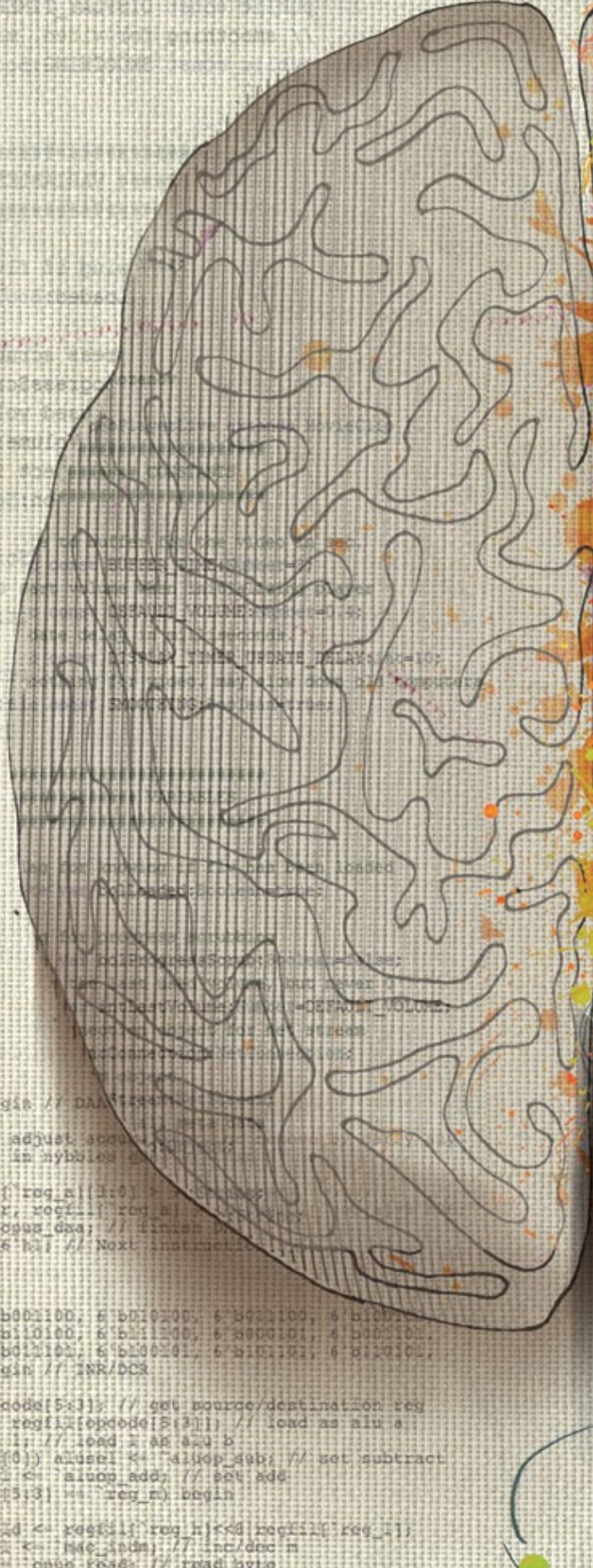


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Left brain

I am the left brain.
I am a scientist. A mathematician.
I love the familiar. I categorize. I am accurate. Linear.
Analytical. Strategic. I am practical.
Always in control. A master of words and language.
Realistic. I calculate equations and play with numbers.
I am order. I am logic.
I know exactly who I am.





Right brain

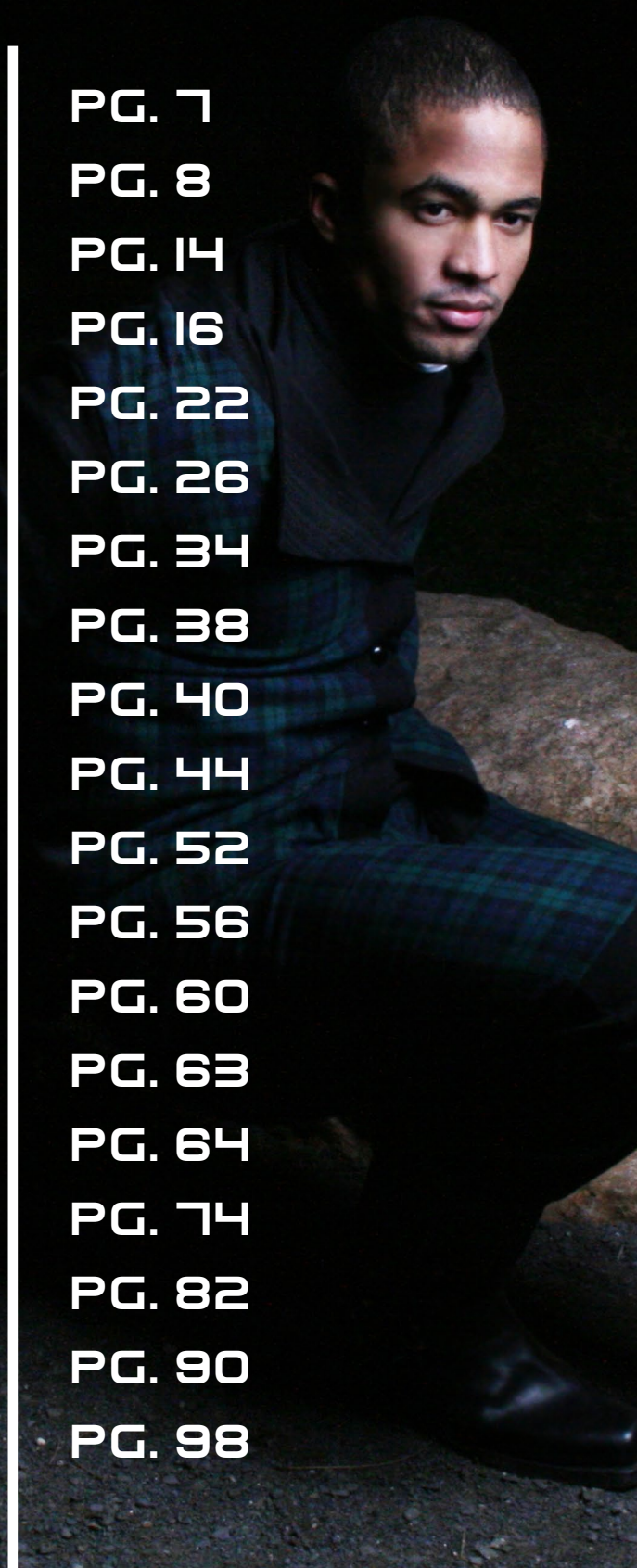
I am the right brain.
I am creativity. A free spirit. I am passion.
Yearning. Sensuality. I am the sound of roaring laughter.
I am taste. The feeling of sand beneath bare feet.
I am movement. Vivid colors.
I am the urge to paint on an empty canvas.
I am boundless imagination. Art. Poetry. I sense. I feel.
I am everything I wanted to be.



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SUAVV

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TRUSSARDI  100 YEARS

From the Editor

Day in and day out, our lives consists of never ending, winding roads of challenges. We're all faced with challenges. Even today, America is faced with challenges in the economy, unemployment, homelessness, and national security. But ultimately, it's how those challenges are dealt with that make a difference on the outcome of our situations. I don't claim to have all the answers to dealing with challenges, though. My own personal remedy: stick it out, tough it through and in the immortal words of Michael Jackson from his album, "Dangerous"... "Keep the Faith."

Putting together this first official print issue of SUAVV Magazine certainly presented its own challenges, but none that weren't well worth the ending results. It's an exciting time for us because SUAVV is entering into a new chapter of its life as a lifestyle, entertainment publication. Our international presence has increased, which includes our overall global readership. Over the past five years we've interviewed some of entertainment, sports and politics biggest names! And we've always prided ourselves on providing content that didn't just entertain, but left you feeling breathlessly fulfilled, a little more knowledgeable, and hopefully, well enlightened. Although I have to say what's probably most exciting about everything happening right now is that we can't predict the future of SUAVV, but we have enough faith to know that this is only the beginning of a new, amazing ride.

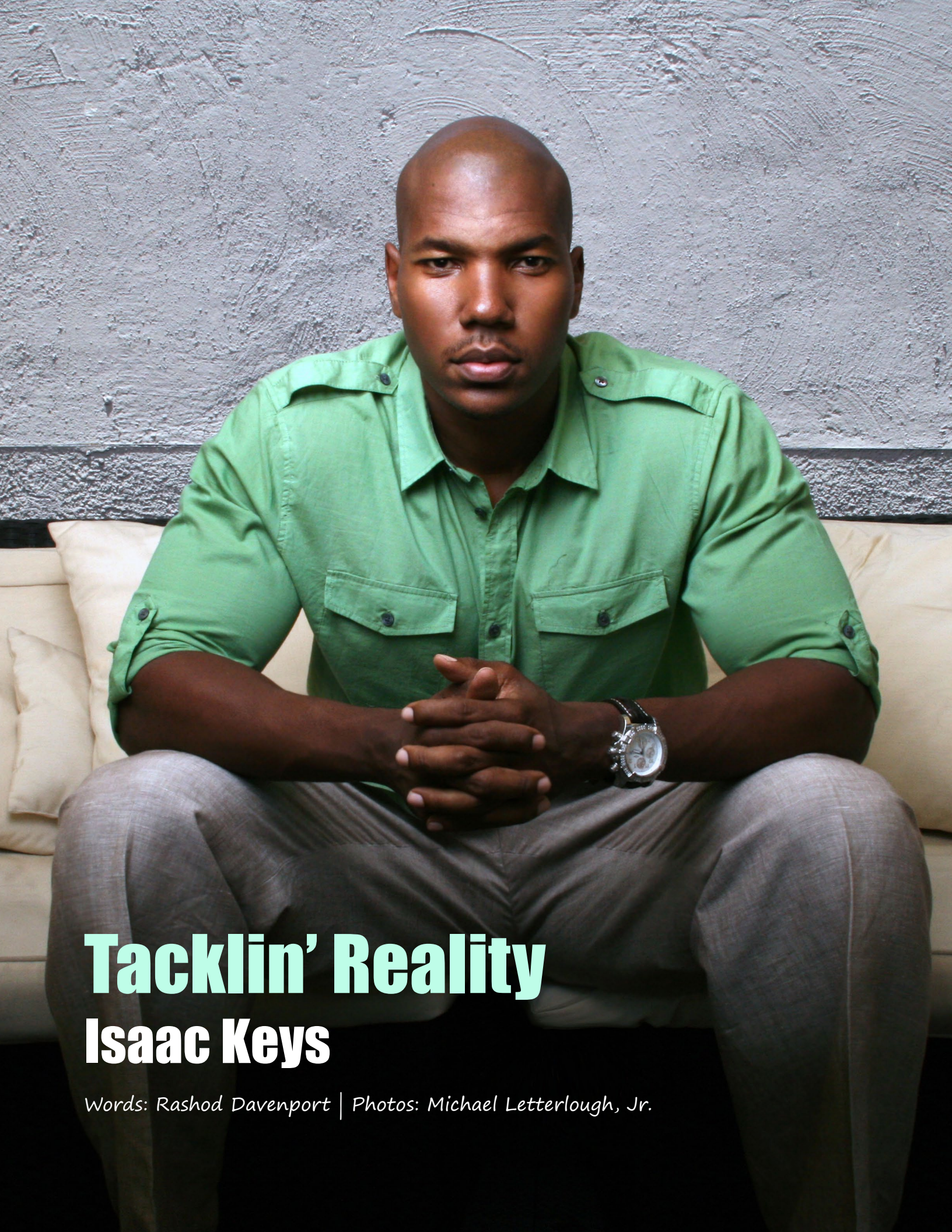
It's important to understand that challenges don't always have to be negative, but you have to believe they're able to place you in a position to be greater than what you were yesterday. I believe SUAVV is greater than it was yesterday, and it will continue to be greater tomorrow than it is today. I think everyone who we've featured in this issue is a perfect example of that as well. From comedian Kevin Hart and Minnesota Viking's tight end, Visanthe Shiancoe, to legendary director Spike Lee and media mogul Russell Simmons, the story of their successes are not without heavily peppered doses of the many challenges they've endured to get where they are.

Our first print issue contains all the familiar elements that SUAVV has been known to highlight throughout the years, such as our SUAVV Seductress, articles related to fitness, relationships, beautiful vacation getaways and original fashion trends and styles. Additionally, SUAVV's focus hasn't changed, and our goal remains the same: to provide cutting edge editorial wrapped around amazing photographic imagery, and be a voice to for the distinguished, urban men of our community. So embrace your challenges, keep the faith and create a better tomorrow from all the experiences you're going through today.

Stay SUAVV!

Michael Letterlough, Jr.





Tacklin' Reality

Isaac Keys

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos: Michael Letterlough, Jr.

“We were staying in bunk beds with 4 dudes to a room,” St. Louis native Isaac Keys says about his stint on the popular TV One reality show Donald Trump’s: The Ultimate Merger. “I did football training camps, but that had nothing on this. I came on the show and I didn’t say a lot. I didn’t feel like I had to talk a lot of shit to anybody. But when I say something, I mean it. I told (the contestants) from the door, ‘I have enough friends, so I’m not necessarily trying to make more, but at the same time the gate is not closed.’ But, understand what you get with me. There’s no sugar coating or any of that. If you ask me something, I’m going to tell you bluntly, and hopefully you can respect me for that in the long run.”

Isaac’s career didn’t begin on TV, but as a walk-on football player for Morehouse College after transferring from The University of North Alabama. Not sure what to expect from the football programs, Isaac applied to all 3 neighboring schools: Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Morris Brown College. It just happened that Morehouse showed the most interest in the blooming defensive player. But to his surprise, the prestigious HBCU was just a little more unorthodox than what he was accustomed to.

“They started doing these chants, telling me how to sit in my chair, and all of these types of things,” Isaac says laughing. “I was like, wait a minute man. It was a big difference from my first year to second year. You mature a lot. I’m like, you’re not gonna just talk to me like that. But they instilled a lot of leadership in some of the kids who came from environments where they were spoon fed or didn’t have the same structure like in the way I was raised. I was raised with discipline, because I had great parents. So you don’t really have to tell me all of that kind of stuff, and you’re not gonna try to brain wash me either.”

Although Isaac wasn’t necessarily the biggest, nor the strongest or the fastest, his passion for football consequently made him an amazing collegiate athlete. His goal was to work the hardest on and off of the field, and after dominating the gridiron he realized that he had the potential and opportunity to go pro. Ordinarily, this would sound like the dream come true, but for Isaac, whose goal was to graduate and attend more schooling to pursue a degree in physical therapy, it was a major hurdle in the decision of his future path. Morehouse was a school focused on academics and they weren’t familiar with gaining proper exposure for an athlete of Isaac’s caliber.

“At one point the president at the time made a statement that he didn’t want Morehouse to be known as a jock college,” Isaac says painfully. “I’m like, come on man. You have Stanford, Yale, Penn, Colum-

“At one point the president (of Morehouse) at the time made a statement that he didn’t want Morehouse to be known as a jock college.”

bia, Brown, and Harvard. They all have great athletics but are still known for academics. At that time it hurt me (emotionally) because I was doing well in school as a student athlete and

now you’re taking my chances to excel in the sport that I love while I’m representing the college. So I was hurt by the school because I didn’t have any direction.”

With his destiny in sports highly dependent on his amount of exposure to the media, as well as NFL teams and scouts, Isaac decided not to sit back and have a pity party. He became very business minded and began to work alongside the athletic director and gained the attention needed for the school that finally earned him his shot. But the amount of television time he gained wouldn’t stray too far away.

After six years of professional football, Isaac took off the helmet and appeared in front of the camera again, only this time he was chasing down reality TV

“A lot of people go into things saying, I’ll never do this and I’ll never do that, but once you’re put into the situation, you have no idea what you would do.”

star Omarosa Manigault, better known to the world as simply, Omarosa.

Like most people, Isaac was a little hesitant. The mystery was that he wasn’t sure what the show would be about. “We knew it was a merger and we knew it was Donald Trump,” he explains. “That lit up all of our eyes because it’s Donald Trump. We knew that it was going to be a merger and that we were going to be finding love. We thought it was going to be like a team kind of thing where we would be merging to start a business or something.” When the fellas found out it was Omarosa, the playing field changed. Despite the fact she’s been coined as “The Woman America Loves to Hate” thanks to her relentless and cut throat tactics on Donald Trump’s Apprentice, Isaac quickly realized that the hasty judgment of the beautiful and accomplished 36 year-old could only come from people that didn’t know anything about her.

“I knew who she was (from television) and that she was depicted as being the so-called bitch,” Isaac says. “But I didn’t really know her. The great part was that she really turned out to be a beautiful woman. She was attractive as well as having [beautiful] qualities, [such as] her mentality, faith, being really down to earth and the type of woman that’s involved in the community. She even played spades and talked a little trash. She’s a chick that you can sit down and talk to and just be yourself.”

And that was exactly Isaac’s plan. Competing with 11 other men of prestigious backgrounds wasn’t the difficult part, it was the fact that the competition was for the relationship with one woman. With the understanding of why he was still single, Isaac felt like he knew what he wanted out of a life partner, and that was complete compatibility. Naturally of course, reality television wasn’t where he felt he would find that person, but the avenue best known for ending careers just as fast as it launches them was now his

new playground.

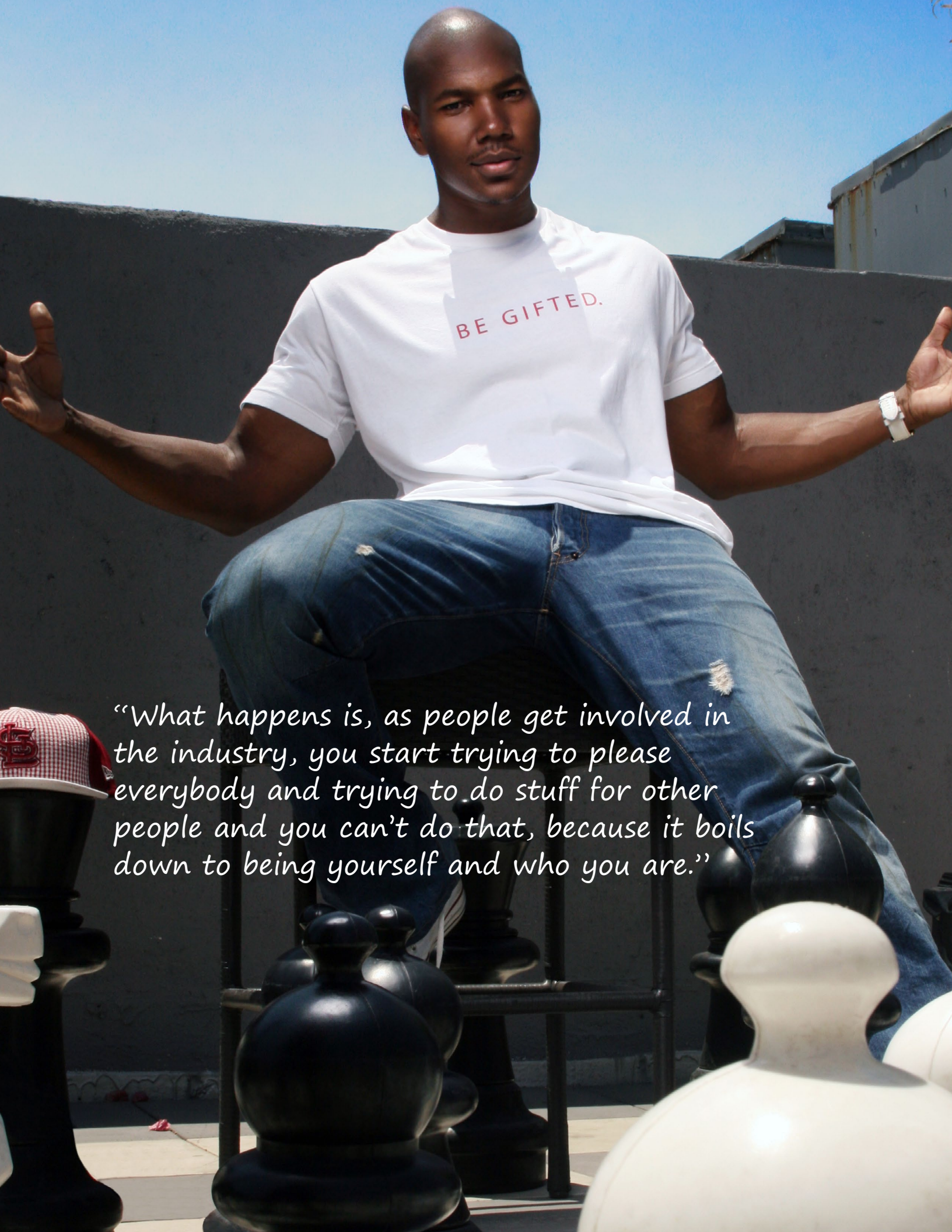
“A lot of people go into things saying, I’ll never do this and I’ll never do that, but once you’re put into the situation, you have no idea what you would do,” Isaac says about the show. “The reality is that you’re really there for that ‘reality.’” And with no breaks from the cameras, the guys, including Isaac, began to ignore their presence after the second day, which of course is all a part of the reality television plan. The only refuge from the cameras was the bathroom, but then again, even there, the bachelors remained a little skeptical.

“Trump’s hotels have little TV’s in the bathrooms,” Isaac says laughing. “So you get out of the shower like ‘Hold on, the TV ain’t workin’, but why is that little green light on?’ So I just gave them what they wanted,” he laughs. “There you go...take that! This isn’t (the network’s) first time doing this show. They knew what to do. They’re going to put you in situations that you’re not going to be able to act out. The part that people don’t realize is that you’re there to allow your natural instincts to happen. They’re going to catch you off guard and they’re going to make sure you’re not prepared for what comes up. That’s when you start to see peoples characteristics come out, including my own.”

Although pursuing a woman for these fellas was a little different than what any of them had been used to. For most of the men on the show, when approaching a woman, you have no idea what other guy may have advanced before you, nor do you know what that person has done or is intending to do to impress her. These guys were jumping through hoops; competing, and arguing while Omarosa sat back, watching and smiling.

“We never knew what she was thinking,” Isaac says. “During the day and the competitions, everything is fun and bubbly. But then when you go to the eliminations everything is so serious. We were just





BE GIFTED.

“What happens is, as people get involved in the industry, you start trying to please everybody and trying to do stuff for other people and you can’t do that, because it boils down to being yourself and who you are.”



laughing 10 minutes ago and now you're all tight faced on me. It was hard dealing with the back and forth."

Dealing with the flip-flop style of the boardroom elimination took Isaac to the top three before he was told he couldn't "close the deal". Once home, he learned that the end result of the show was designed so that none of the men could actually accomplish winning over the reality diva. With such a large fan base watching the show, Isaac felt the audience was immediately let down and upset. The viewer's sat through an entire season of picking their favorites with the assumption that the outcome of the competition is a winner. Isaac, who feels the viewers are owed some kind of reconciliation, looks forward to what TV One might present in the idea of having a part two.

Nevertheless, he walked away from the experience wiser and with a better understanding of himself and what he needs in a relationship. But the world of reality TV has become a concept that only emulates the actual world we live in. For about an hour

every week, you're able to leave your own problems of the real world and walk in the shoes of someone else's, becoming, in a sense, a part of their success, drama, and excitement. It's turned the epic days of sitcoms and drama TV into an easily packaged personal account of the "who's who" or "who's that" of the world.

"It takes a lot to really walk this path of life and there's going to be a lot of ups and downs," Isaac says passionately. "What happens is, as people get involved in the industry, you start trying to please everybody and trying to do stuff for other people and you can't do that, because it boils down to being yourself and who you are. You can't please everybody. There's not possible way. It's good to feel that as a minority I am able to be seen as a positive person. You walk around with a perception of yourself but it takes you to be humbled to know how other people see you. People have really attached themselves to me, so I'm cool with the positive or negative comments. I'm still going to be me. I just stay true to myself." **S**

Teairra Mari has been singing for as long as she can remember. She didn't have an epiphany about singing, she just turned to her mother who dubbed as her songwriter and told her she was ready and determined to pursue her dream. "My mom was such a great writer so she wrote me my first couple of songs," Teairra reflects. "We took the songs and recorded them in her friends basement who is like family to us. We finally had something that was good enough to release on Detroit radio on the unsigned Hype section that they had and I became a local celebrity."

With her music blaring through Detroit radio, Teairra gained the attention of Big Mike of KISS Productions and abandoned the basement beats that kicked off her career to progress to the high quality arrangements that landed her the iconic meet and sign audition for Island Def Jam Executive LA Reid. She dropped a hit single, then another, then another and was put on the national map. But at the peak of her success, the behind the scenes realism was beginning to eat away at the teen star.

"My team wasn't put together well," Teairra explains. "We were so new to the business and didn't know much I was a minor so there were no frustrations. Everything was fun for me at that time. Some of the adults around me took that innocence and that fun away from me because they let me see too much. If I was managing my child's career she wouldn't have saw a lot of the bullshit. I would have kept her up to part to know what's going on but there is a way that you can do it to keep her encouraged and on the right track because one thing you don't want to do is knock away that confidence because once you do it shows and it affects the project and the team. So whatever you need to do to keep the diamond safe that's what you do. I feel like for me, I saw too much too early."

While her environment was playing a huge role in the deterioration of her support system, it inevitably lead her to receive a call on the night of her prom from the label executives letting her know that she

would no longer be an artist on Island Def Jam. In the midst of this huge letdown, she decided to mimmick the attitude of pop icon Janet Jackson and took control of her life and career. "I told myself that if anything happened this time I didn't want to be able to point the finger at anyone except myself," Teairra says with strong confidence. "If I mess it up I will take the responsibility but I would never know (what could happen) unless I give it that shot."

With not having much to talk about outside of her album and what it felt like to work with Jay-Z, Teairra realized that when it came to her own projects, she had to end conversations. Nonetheless, this gives her more of a reason to, in her words, work her ass off. While using life and the things that she has been through to inspire and motivate others, she has taken her defeats and made them victorious. "I have been able to convert those feelings into beautiful music," She says with a smile that radiates through the phone." From my career troubles to my relationship trials, to just everything that I have been through has inspired where I am now, from the content of what I sing to the way that I sing it."

That energy and work ethic along with her talent caught the attention of Hip Hop DJ, DJ Drama who reached out to be the first female R&B artist that will release a mixtape with entitled "Point of No Return" with the notable turntable wiz. Irrefutably, there are always those that will try to steal the sunshine from her. Instead of backlash, she has some very comforting words for her naysayers.

"I'm doing what makes me happy and I'm living my life," Teairra says. "If you don't like what I'm doing, too bad that's your problem not mine. Hopefully you get your issues together with yourself. There is no reason that you should be that concerned in somebody's business that you're asking questions about why they are pursuing their craft. If you don't want to hear my music then don't listen to it. I just smile, God Bless you baby." **S**

A photograph of Teairra Marley sitting on a white, ornate chair. She is wearing a purple, ruffled, strapless dress and large, ornate earrings. Her hands are clasped on the chair's armrest, and she is wearing a large, round, diamond-encrusted ring. She has long, dark, wavy hair and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a bright, pinkish-white wall, and the floor is made of light-colored wood. A pair of red high-heeled sandals with silver straps is on the floor in the foreground.

*Sincerely
Yours,
Teairra*

*Words: Rashod Davenport
Photos: Courtesy of Atlantic Records*



Fashion Knockout

Ngo Okafor

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos provided by Ngo Okafor

With 3 years of professional training, a model became a golden gloves winner, and was on his way to being considered one of the best boxers of his generation. American born and Nigeria raised Ngo Okafor stands 6'2" 187 pounds of muscle and intimidation. He hasn't always been the guy across the ring waiting to pummel his opponents. Breaking the mold of what most people think of a model, (a slender kid who is probably a little awkward with a meek demeanor) he spent about 6 years in various photography studios as one of the most popular Black Male Models in the industry. Ngo knew what he wanted and wasn't willing to let anyone stand in his way...not even his parents.

Ngo's father holds a PhD from Harvard University and believes that a "career" is what an adult should possess. With that said, Ngo graduated from the University of Connecticut and began working for the Connecticut Department of Transportation, teaching engineers and architects how to draw using computers and soon, Ngo found himself laid off. Deciding that he didn't want to go back to corporate America, He approached a photographer that attended the same gym as he did and expressed his plan to become a model. That was the moment that changed his life.

"I took the pictures to a couple of agencies and they loved it and they started sending me out (for jobs)," Ngo reflects. "Things were easier back then because there was a lot more money and the economy was good, so business was good. You

worked all of the time and it was good. It felt good to have the success. I felt free because now, I REALLY didn't have to go and get a 'real job' (laughing). Every time I booked something, I would call my dad and tell him. He was always wondering about how much I was making and if I was saving my money. So, I would call him to tell him that was doing well and I wasn't going to get a real job (laughing)."

Regardless of the success that Ngo was gaining through modeling, booking everything from fashion shows to commercials, campaigns, and soap operas, his parents still saw him as wasting his time, talents, and life. They fought for years against their son decision. Times where he would go home to visit them, he would get confronted by a barrage of questions like "When he was going to get a real job? and When are you going to go back to school?" Ngo attributes his strength as a man to his parents and the time that he had to use it most came when these questions would arise. He knew what he wanted for his life and was going to live that life with or without their support.

"Why should I try to live my life by living your life," Ngo explains. "I told them that 'If you want to disown me that's on you but I'm going to do what I want to do'. I got to the point that I told them 'If you say one more negative thing about me, you're never going to see me again.' And that was the end of it. They never fought or said anything else about me modeling or acting."

After sparring with his parents verbally and emotionally, he decided to do it for fitness in a ring at the gym. Ngo was told that he should think about pursuing competitive boxing seriously because of the raw talent that he possessed. Realistically, he was 30 years old and had never trained as a boxer a day in his life and didn't have an ounce of interest in the sport. Sure, he was athletic and in shape due to playing basketball on the street, running, and lifting weights, but how would he be able to stand in the ring with fighters that had been training their entire lives, legacy kids whose parents would push them for this career from day they could walk?

Ambition, drive, focus, and a hell of a punch. It was a way for him to play sports (which was forbidden in his father's house). Working out as much and as he had as long as he had, he knew that his opponents wouldn't be as strong as he was. They wouldn't be as strong mentally going through all of the stuff that he had gone through. October of 2005, he began to train as an amateur boxer. By February 2006, he was in his first fight...Ngo lost and quit boxing.

"I stopped (boxing) because of the way the fight was stopped," Ngo explains. "I felt that the referee didn't give me a chance. I've hurt guys and the ref gave them plenty of chances to recover. They stopped my fight right away. So I felt like the sport was bullshit. So I put all of my stuff away and went back to the lucrative modeling and acting career. After that year off, I realized I didn't want to go out as a loser and started training again. I was going to give it my best shot and at the time I felt that it would be my last shot. I was going to use the anger from the first fight and first lost to train."

When he reemerged in the summer of 2007, boxing became an addiction for Ngo. He was training for his life. Boxing became life or death and he was ready to die. He knew the risks and came to the conclusion that he was happier boxing than not at all. Therefore, he did all that he could to prevent himself from getting injured.

He put his modeling career to the side and completely focused on his taped gloves and laced boots as his career, which wouldn't sit well with his newly understanding parents when they found out. That's right, he had already fought his first amateur fight and was 2 weeks out from his finals in the Golden Gloves Tournament of 2008 and his parents still had

no clue what he was doing. Ngo invited his brother from London to attend the event and shortly after, there was a call from his father.

"They called me and was talking about me getting brain damage and the amount of cells I was going to lose," Ngo says laughing. "I told them, 'Whatever is going to happen, within the next two weeks will happen so don't worry about it.' You have to be cold. If you want to live life the way you live it, you can't listen to what people think is best for you based on their negatives. Everybody, even your parents will jump on your success. A lot of times it comes from a loving place but that means nothing to a person who has a dream."

Ngo went on to win the tournament...twice...back to back. He also held a Heavyweight Title twice. Knowing that his opponents wouldn't come into the ring with the same mentality, he found his advantage as a boxer. He began to box in gladiator form. He knew that his punches would hurt, he knew he had power. That was the advantage he had over his early 20-somethings opponents that sat on the other side of the ring.

"A lot of times when you punch someone hard in the face, whatever skills they have will go out of the door and it becomes survival," Ngo laughs. "When you go into a survival stage, if you're not mentally tough, the fight is over. I knew that if hit them hard enough early enough, that would change the fight because they would have to fight to survive. The people that come into the ring, they're used to being better than everyone else. Nobody stands up to them. They're like a bully. Nobody punches them back in the face and when that happens they crumble."

After winning his second Golden Glove tournament, Ngo was asked to take on a role in the movie 'The Rebound' starring Catherine Zeta Jones where he was able to portray a World Champion boxer fighting former Cruiserweight World Champion Al Cole. Shooting the movie for Ngo was a flash into his life. With a real audience and real cheering, the two boxers lost the choreography and began to spar in the ring as if it was a real fight. "With all of that noise we forgot that it wasn't real" Ngo laughs. "So we started throwing real punches. And they were like whoa whoa whoa this is just a movie and then

"They called me and was talking about me getting brain damage and the amount of cells I was going to lose..."





“I was willing to separate myself from my family and was ready to die for my dream...”

we snapped back out until the crowd got worked up again (laughing) it was fun.”

With a successful boxing career and the wrapping of ‘The Rebound’, Ngo decided to get back into acting as well as modeling. He accomplished his goal as a fighter and was ready to pursue more. He began filming his full featured documentary entitled “Triumph of the Will”. The film was to be a boxing documentary, yet later in the process, was decided to be turned into a life story showing his success. This was important because Ngo wanted others to be encouraged and inspired to pursue their dreams as well. With the ambition to have control over the projects that he works on, Ngo plans to write, produce, and star. He hired a team and began working on his first screenplay.

Ngo had a dream. It wasn’t to be a boxer, actor, model, or producer. His dream was to live life the way that he wanted to do it and to enjoy his journey so that when he looks back there wouldn’t be any regrets. That’s exactly what he did. He saw something that he wanted and he pursued it. He worked hard, dedicated his time and life to it and became successful, even when it looked as though he could lose everything.

“I was willing to separate myself from my family and was ready to die for my dream,” Ngo says passionately. “For me what’s the point of living without a passion, without love, what’s the point? You’re just a robot like anyone else.” **S**

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On Her Own

Naturi Naughton

Words: Rashod Davenport

Though she didn't get a chance to see her break until later in life, acting for Naturi Naughton began with her singing career and her passion to be an entertainer. The 26 year old East Orange, New Jersey native accelerated her career from a 15 year old pop star to performing on Broadway's Hit 'HAIR-SPRAY' and leading roles on the sets of Hollywood projects 'NOTORIOUS', 'FAME', and 'LOTTERY TICKET'. Even though the process had its bumps in the road, Naturi was consistent to one major trait—keeping true to herself. For the typical young adult, it would be very easy to become trapped in the mindset of the roles. Especially as the hardcore female rapper Lil' Kim.

"It's interesting because I didn't believe that I could conquer the role," Naturi says. "I had to build up my confidence and my ability as an actress to really transition and do something totally different it was a challenge and I love being challenge and that was very different from myself."

Lil'Kim, being the outspoken vessel that she is put the quiet and reserved Naturi in a position that she wasn't used to. Nonetheless, with all acting opportunities, a little piece of the character wears off on you. The role gave Naturi a splash of self-confidence and the ability to embrace herself as a woman. Beyond the mental advancements, she had to make sure that she could pull off the sexy persona of the rap star.

"I was most concerned in the area where it came to some of the scenes and how sexy she had to be and the fact that my character wasn't going to be wearing many clothes for most of the movie," Naturi laughs. "But I had to swallow it and say 'you know this is the character and I'm portraying a real person and this is going to help me as an actress down the line and I have to take a leap on a challenge'. I was in the gym everyday I was trying to make sure that if I'm going to do it I'm going to do it right. At the end of the day anything that we do whether were nervous or scared you have to do it with all of your heart and soul and that's what I was going to do."

With her first major movie wrapped and under her belt, Naturi didn't sit back and take in the success, she returned to Broadway to finish the contracted run of 'HAIRSPRAY'.

"I'm one of those people that doesn't get all Hollywood," she says. "I don't fall into the hype. I don't

say you know I booked a movie and I'm going to chill out. I went back to work and was ready to go on to the next one."

Given the opportunity to film the movie and return, was a blessing for her. She put her feet to the ground and continued performing 8 times a week as well as auditioning. 3 months later she landed the role of classical pianist trainee Denise in the remake of 'FAME'.

"FAME was a lot of hard work," Naturi chuckles. "Everything that I could do with dancing and singing and acting I had to implement into the role. Playing the piano in the one scene is something that I didn't do. I learned and perfected classical music which was another challenge just like Lil Kim was a challenge. When you see that scene (performing 'On My Own')I really learned to do that. So, I am really fortunate. I was really proud because I didn't know how to do a lot of what I did in the movie until I worked with my (piano)coach. I worked 3 times a week studying and reading the music and studying the posture of a classical pianist. I love to play because it gives me peace of mind and time to think."

Even though she wouldn't put on a concert of a classical pianist, Naturi learned to play Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata and Chopin Nocturne in G-Minor. Even though she doesn't know many songs, she purchased a piano after the movie and utilizes the stroke of an ivory key to relieve the stresses of the world. It's one more skill that she can add to her acting resume and allowed it to build her as a person.

The next skill added to her resume would be learning to laugh and relax. This would come with the help of director Eric White and the cast of her next movie 'Lottery Ticket'. Eric knew Naturi from her days in 3LW and was always supportive and liked her vibe. Therefore, after linking up with rapper Bow Wow and comedian Brandon T. Jackson, it was an instant connection. Never having done a comedy, it took Naturi a while to adjust to all of the jokes on set.

"I already knew Bow Wow because we came up in the business together and we did a bunch of tour dates together," Naturi explains. "We knew each other since we were like 15 but I hadn't seen him in years. But, he (Bow Wow), Brandon, and I were road dogs. They played a lot of practical jokes on me. I was like the mama of the group telling them

“Success changes things and it’s so unfortunate. You come up together and you’re close when you don’t have a record deal. But then when you get a platinum album, the whole dynamic of the group changes.”

to act right and every one was making fun of me for that. But it was like being around a family which was really great.”


Contrary to belief, the 26 year old star to be has had her share of ups and downs very early in her career. There has been speculation for years on the relationship with her and the former members of her group 3LW. There have been rumors about how she left the group and why she left the group. Tired of the dwelling and the lies, Naturi is putting it all on the table.

“I will basically say it was one of those situations with the group where I was not treated the right way and respected as a full member,” She explains. “There were 3 people and should be treated equally and it wasn’t that situation. What happens is when you get a little success, people within the group, management or outsiders do things to taint the relationship which is something that happened with us. Success changes things and it’s so unfortunate. You come up together and you’re close when you don’t have a record deal. But then when you get a platinum album, the whole dynamic of the group changes. But it’s sad because I feel like we could have been the next Destiny’s Child. But management and the whole deal was just a negative time in my life. It took a lot for me to get through that and pick myself back up. So, when I talk about it, I try to help other people be encouraged. Because a lot of people were asking what happened to me and why I just disappeared or that I wasn’t going to be able to have a career and I am really grateful that I was

able to get through the break up with the group and come back on my own.”

Naturi credits her success to her fans and industry professionals that continued to believe in her and weren’t afraid to give her a chance. Now, she is ready to show the world how much of a multi-talented and multi-faceted performer she actually is. She would love the opportunity to record music again, yet, it’s something that she has on the back burner for the moment.

For now, Naturi is focused on being the best actress that she can be. She is focused on her dream role hoping that a producer somewhere finds it to be interesting. Showcasing the life of Civil Rights Activist Coretta Scott King.

“She was a classical singer and studied classical musical and was thinking about being a professional singer in opera,” Naturi says with excitement. “I’ve been researching and studying and it would be awesome if I would be able to show some of her behind the scene strengths and being able to support Martin Luther King Jr. and the movement. She did so many things that people don’t know about. And I would love to portray her. Holla at me producers, Holla at me.” 



Autumn Essie-Bailey Ford was raised by her great Aunt on her fathers' side of the family since the age of three-weeks-old. By the age of nine, her father had died from drug abuse and by the age of 12 her mother died of HIV. Nonetheless, she is on her way to becoming the "It" girl she so passionately desires. As a child she defied the odds, becoming one of the most prestigious producers to emerge from Shaw University in Raleigh NC. While taking the film industry by storm, she still finds time to give back to her fellow film dreamers by partnering with Atlanta, Ga. Peachtree Film Festival. Where she gets the chance, not only to connect and educate those who share her same passion for film, but to be the positive force in someone else's life that she wasn't able to have in her own.

"If anything I don't have a relationship with my mother at all, never did," Autumn explains. "When I did see her it was a lot of negativity. As far as me being a little too dark and I look like my father. And I have another sibling by my mother who is very light skinned so she was always treated a lot better than me so I really don't call that a relationship. It doesn't faze me. It is what it is."

We sat down with autumn and dug in a little deeper about her passions, her past, and her future. Trust

Obstacle Obliviator

Autumn Essie-Bailey Ford

Words: Rashod Davenport

me, she is well on her way to becoming what she considers, the African American producer version of Donald Trump.

SUAVV: How did it feel, as a child, to have people tell you you'll never be anything?

Bailey: It was very disturbing. I acted out as a child, I was not perfect. I was very bad. I wasn't robbing people or beating people up but I acted out in school. I guess by me doing that they just figured I'm not going to be nothing but the whole time I always had a plan in the back of my head. Just because I was getting suspended from school and talking out of turn or whatever the case may be I always said I was going to be in the entertainment business, I'm going to be a producer. But, I never told anybody that because they always talked down on me.

SUAVV: Knowing that you weren't able to turn to anyone and express your goals and dreams, how did that affect you as a child? And how does that impact you as an adult with the mentoring you do now?

Bailey: I prayed a lot and gave it to God. That was the only person I could talk too. My aunt, who is now 81 years-old raised me: that's my mom. She's done a lot. She was there for me, but with her being older, there were only certain things I could talk to her about. I had cousins and sisters who were close in age but I couldn't even talk to them. I just started to talk to them. As a child it hurt. It hurt a lot. I would go to bed and cry at night thinking why do I have family like this? Why do I have teachers who don't believe in me? What did I do wrong? It was always a lot of whys. I guess by having those questions is why I acted out the way I did. What I try and tell the young girls and guys now is no it's not you. You know who you are because in the back of your mind you are always going to have a plan. Dreams do come true,

“I was at a time in my life when everyone was saying ‘you’re not going to college, ain’t no college going to accept you.’”

that’s what I try to tell them. It’s about turning that “why” into “what you can do to better yourself”.

Suavv: That is an amazing way to turn your tragedy into triumph. You took on a lot as a child, did growing up with the barriers that you had, give you any complexes as an adult?

Bailey: It gave me animosity towards black men. I had to go to a HBCU to really realize my self-worth. I really just liked light skinned guys and you had to be White, Puerto Rican, or something for me to even talk to you. I just didn’t want anybody dark like me because if we got married and had babies the baby would have bad hair, you know typical. I had that mindset because that’s what my mother used to put in my head as a child. Once I went to Shaw University and seen the black love and really understood it, I just said I can’t be with anybody other than a black man.

SUAVV: Being at an HBCU will do that for you. How did you like your schooling experience?

Bailey: It was a blast. I wouldn’t trade it for nothing. Shaw University is actually one of the oldest black colleges in the south. It helped me so much. I was at a time in my life when everyone was saying “you’re not going to college, ain’t no college going to accept you”. I started believing that, but I applied to Shaw and they accepted me. After that every other school I applied to, which weren’t HBCUs, accepted me also. If I could go back, I’d do it all over again. The experience is mind-blowing. They care about their students, they’re there for you. I could pick up the phone at 2-3 o’clock in the morning and call my professors and they will actually pick up the phone and sit there and talk. It’s like a family. I don’t know what the experience is like at a predominantly White school, but, a HBCU...I wouldn’t trade it for anything. Shaw University made me the woman I am.

SUAVV: I understand completely. I haven’t been able to find anyone that attended an HBCU say anything different. Okay, let’s get into your career. When did you become involved in film?


Bailey: Ever since high school I used to be out on the stoop with a stick of deodorant having my own little talk show acting like I was Oprah. Just talk-

ing and running in everybody’s business as a child. And then I used to work at the TV station at school. Ever since I was nine, I used to love sitting at home watching movies all day. Everyone else was at the skating rink or going bowling but I would be at home watching a classic Bob Hope and Ben Crosby movie or a Shirley Temple movie. I just love movies and that turned into me educating myself and understanding what goes behind how a movie is made.

SUAVV: That’s where dreams are made...in the mind first. Now you are in the 5th year of the Peachtree Village International Film Festival. What’s the story behind that?

Bailey: I’m director of panels as well as a producer. We are about education; we bring in different people like Steven Harris from A & E and network executives, we’ve brought in representatives for Kid’N’Play and a couple of other people. Our goal is educating the attendees on the craft, letting them know this is how you take a film and get distribution, this is how you seek funding for a film. We take our time and educate. Each month we do different workshops and hold different classes to inspire people.

SUAVV: That’s a tool that is invaluable. You actually have a few projects that you are working on at the moment that should be amazing.

Bailey: I just got the rights to remake the 1972 film that the late Ossie Davis directed called Black Girl. It was also a Broadway stage play by J. E. Franklin. I’m a co-producer on the Florence Ballard bio-pic. Florence is one of the Supremes lead singer with Diana Ross and Mary Wilson. We have Faith Evens who will play the role of Florence. I feel blessed to be a part of that epic film and I thankful for the Executive producers for hiring me. We shall start Pre-Production in Atlanta in late February We are just trying to tell the story from Florence’s eyes and give her time to shine. I’m working on another film called The Preacher Man, Step Sisters, Templeton pride web series and a few other great projects as well 

To learn more about Autumn and her projects visit her at www.pviff.com www.abentertainment05.com



Writing the Code

Kim Brummell

Words: Rashod Davenport

After about 6 year in the US Military, Kim Brummell, felt that it was time to take her experiences and turn them into her passion...Film. Using her military background and political interest, Kim, decided to set a new standard for how minorities as a whole are portrayed in films by writes to breaking barriers. Growing up in the small town of Oxford, North Carolina (approximately 30 minutes from Durham) Kim was able to witness firsthand the obstacles that faced her community.

Therefore, she decided that she was ready to get away from home for a while as well as make money and take advantage of the military educational package. Starting her first real job also allowed her to have the opportunity to tour different places, meet different people, and learn different cultures, it hit home how much those obstacles held back the people that she know and love. Rightly so, too her passion of film and decided to write as many movies as she could and geared towards minorities that are overcoming those same obstacles that she did.

SUAVV: When you decided to be a director what steps did you have to take to bring your

vision to reality?

Kim: There was actually a gap between when I came up with the idea to when I wrote my script. It was a struggle to really learn what Hollywood would want to accept as far as screen plays and what types of things they were actually looking for. I did some research on the Internet and ended up coming in contact with two screen writing consultants, and they taught me the ropes of how to put a screen play together. At first, I didn't really know the power of networking over the Internet. It was a learning process. I really had to learn the whole phase of getting a screen play out there because I didn't have an agent. I had to learn that the independent side was the way to go.

SUAVV: I think that's the realization that all start-up businesses have to realize. Do you feel like you learned a lot more getting into the industry on your own?

Kim: Yes, because when you do things on your own you get to see what mistakes you made and

“I keep up with a lot of news related events dealing with crime and racism and minorities or a lot of the time the victims in the cases. So that was really my main push to show minorities in a positive light.”

what mistakes you don't need to make the next go around. That helped me to see all the dos and don'ts the ins and outs of the screen writing process and getting a movie out there. That was helpful to me.

SUAVV: That's very true. You learn by doing instead of having done. Being a Black female film director, especially starting up in the industry and doing this on your own, what kind of challenges do you run into?

Kim: There's not too many Black female writers, period. So that in itself is a setback. As far as the screen writing phase, they say if you don't know somebody it's always hard to really get out there especially if you are not living in places like Los Angeles or New York. So to me the challenge of being a female in screen writing is the hardest part.

SUAVV: Yeah I can see how not having the right connections can make it difficult. What inspired you to write the first movie? Most people would think that the first movie is the one that has the most thought to it.

Kim: I was interested in politics and crime shows so I was inspired to come up with an idea based on law enforcement, racism and discrimination. I always had an interest to put something together based on those types of things happening all over the world.

SUAVV: We all know that the cast of a first time film is hard to develop. How difficult was it for you to find the right combination for your cast?


Kim: It wasn't hard compared to getting the actual script out there. The power of networking helped me get my cast together. I went on two different websites finding actors who wanted to be a part

of scripts. I made contact with the websites and let them know whom I was interested in and went about getting the actors contact information. The initial point of contact was through me. I acted as the casting director.

SUAVV: So you were very hands on with the process. Can you explain you're film 'Code of Death'?

Kim: It's actually a crime drama thriller screen play. I had it based in a small town. I didn't want to base it in a big city like New York or LA. There are enough films based in those major cities. My background kind of played itself out in the film. I keep up with a lot of news related events dealing with crime and racism and minorities or a lot of the time the victims in the cases. So that was really my main push to show minorities in a positive light. I thought it was very important, as an African American woman, to tell our side of the story and show us coming out on top.

SUAVV: Being able to do something that you feel will uplift your community is reward of its own. But, knowing how you worked to on the film to relay the message that you are, do you find it difficult getting support in your own community?

Kim: From the very beginning yes. If people don't know anything about the whole movie industry it can be somewhat difficult until you actually get out there with your first project. But, once you do get out there you see more and more people supporting you and your progress. It is somewhat of a struggle depending on where you are. You have to overcome that and keep networking. 



International Visionary Tanecia Britt

Words: Rashod Davenport

that you wouldn't necessarily see in a movie theater every day. Films that are told no because they are too raw. The storyline might not be what the public needs at this time. And for us we can care less what the public needs as far as storyline. We are here for the film makers. That is the importance of film festivals. I think throughout the years it has lost its essence. Film festivals in general have lost their essence because they focus on mainstream films, films that have the distribution and fan-base. That's not what this film festival is about.

SUAVV: How often do you break barriers?

Tanecia: I try to do it every day. I try to do something different every day. I'm a film maker first. There are a lot of obstacles I have to break even conducting business. When it comes to the film festival I try to make it like this is the hoo-raa. This is for all of the no's, all the we're not ready yet's, the maybes, most worth it when it comes to the film festival. Regardless, when it's all said and done film workers work hard to make film. There is a difference between really working hard on your project and throwing a film together just so you can say you made a film. This film festival literally weeds out those people.

SUAVV: When you see someone throwing a film together just so they can say they've done so, how does that make you feel?

Tanecia: It's disheartening. I know what it takes to make a film and then have your film be in a film festival. My feature film was accepted and I've literally seen crews sleep in their cars to make their shoot time the next day. I've seen crews eat cold sandwiches back to back to back just because they love the film and they love the concept and what's going on. So, for you to just come in and throw together a film, I take personal offense. You're wasting other people's time. It labels independent film as not even worth it. I do take it personal because I've spent a lot of time and dedication on my career and I feel

When limits aren't enough and boundaries need to be pushed there is a film festival that embraces the uncommon and pushes the every day norm to the side. For Tanecia Britt, she had to develop the festival that would not only embrace the creativity of a film maker, but allow them to express themselves fully without the boundaries in place.

Wanting very raw films that could possibly be banned in the US, were the type of risqué' films that Tanecia wanted to push. Allowing a film maker to make your skin crawl, make you upset, make you love, make you hate was what she had in mind with The DC Maryland Virginia International Film Festival. She wanted films that show the film-makers point of view, not the storytellers.

When she set out to put the DMVIFF together, she made a remarkable decision to open the doors to international artists as well—a decision that sits well with the International visionary herself.

SUAVV: As a film maker yourself, what was it that you were looking to promote through your festival?

Tanecia: One thing I want to do is provide that platform and that venue for film makers locally and internationally for them to screen their work, work

like as a film maker I have to do this. And as a film maker they should as well. It's a protocol.

SUAVV: When you realized that you needed to weed out the people how did you decide to build the criteria to be in the film festival?

Tanecia: You have to have great work. You have to have a project in production after 2008, and be of local decent. You have to be either from, raised or live in DC, Maryland or Virginia. And you can also be from international territory. If the project was shot in DC it can be submitted. It's not a regional film festival. You have to be from or have projects in these certain areas in order for them to be considered.

SUAVV: Seeing that you decided to go to the home base and run the film festival, has DC ever been known for film?

Tanecia: Not that I know of. There is the Washington Independent Film Festival but there hasn't been any actual venues that is dedicated to actually screening local talent. I haven't seen it. When I was researching to put my feature films into festivals, I found none. That just let me believe that route and that path had to be created.

SUAVV: How many people do you feel like don't really get it?

Tanecia: I think the people who don't get it are the ones who have already made it. The people in Hollywood, the big-ups, the people who support Tyler Perry, they don't get it. For me, it's the ones who are trying to get it, soon get it, but then they lose the essence of it. It's like you work so hard to get in the circle but once you get in the circle you become a blond but your whole life you've been a brunette. So, bump that inner circle I'll go internationally. Ingmar Bergman, he was a Swedish film maker who made film from his soul. He used film making to explore the human psyche. He was like a mad scientist. I would still call Spike Lee a good director also.

SUAVV: How do you feel about the feud between Tyler Perry and Spike Lee?

Tanecia: I think Spike is an older, angrier, male version of me. He feels the same way I feel. I think Spike is justified in what he was saying he was just a bit brash. But, if you really look at Spike Lee's work you can tell he is a very brash person anyway. I think it was in character for him to do that. He is completely justified, I'm tired of seeing Madea, I'm tired of hearing how black men did us wrong, I'm tired of hearing the same cliché stories. Make mov-

ies to change the world, to change another human being. There is more to film making with Tyler Perry, he pushes stereotypes. Spike Lee made films to break stereotypes and here is this guy from nowhere coming in bringing us right back from where we started. It's like back tracking someone's work. of course he's going to be upset.

SUAVV: What do you want for the film makers in the festival?

Tanecia: I want them to get exposure. I want film makers to do what they are supposed to do at a film festival and that is to promote their work. We are not here to do the work for them. They need to push their films. We are giving them a venue. This is exposure for them so I need them to interact as much as possible that's why there are Q and A's, that's why people talk about it, that's why we are having pre-view parties so they can understand their audience.

SUAVV: What do you think of the documentaries that push the limits?

Tanecia: People that do documentaries have a lot to say they just have to know how to say it. Documentaries are naturally boring. They are telling a story that people already know, the same story that the news tells us every day. Documentary film makers have to have a creative way to getting their point across in the same format as being a documentary. That's why you see docudrama's like "The Office". They are shot in the documentary style but they are entertaining.

SUAVV: At the end of the film festival where do you go after everything is all said and done?

Tanecia: After it's done we are going to be promoting the films we show this summer throughout the year. In the winter time, I've locked down a deal in London, England and we are going to have a two-day mini festival of the films only that will show here this summer. So film makers that are local who never thought they would get their work seen in England will have the opportunity to have their work shown. There is a winner for the festival. They get a nice shinny award and then they get headlined in London. They become the main feature on our website for about two months. Our grand jury winner gets a film produced. **S**

To learn more about Tanecia and the DMVIFF, please visit www.dmviff.com and www.tbrittproject.org

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair, wearing glasses and a black top, smiling warmly. The background is dark and out of focus.

Queen of the CIAA

Shera White

Words: Anjelica Duggins | Photo: Michael Letterlough, Jr.

“It’s a shame that the other sports don’t get the attention. It’s something we’re working on. As long as the tournament is what it is, we will always be known for it.”

Established in 1912, the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) is the oldest African American athletic conference in the nation. The CIAA consists of private and public Historically Black Colleges and Universities along the East Coast from Pennsylvania down to North Carolina. CIAA sponsors 16 men and women’s championships including cross country, volleyball, football, indoor and outdoor track, basketball, women’s bowling, tennis, golf, baseball and softball—a understanding that Shera wants to make sure that the general public understands.

“The problem is even though the tournament is as large as it’s and it’s successful and it’s the money maker, they think the CIA is the tournament,” Shera explains. “It’s a shame that the other sports don’t get the attention. It’s something we’re working on. As long as the tournament is what it is, we will always be known for it. It’s not a bad thing but when you’re playing one of the other sports, it’s a difference. We have Olympians. St Augustine’s pumps out Olympians on a regular basis. They have over 30 national championships. When that is overshadowed, it’s hard for them. So we are trying to use the tournament to filter out the other programs.”

Gaining attention for the other athletic programs has been starting to flow a little better for Shera. There is a system that has been in place to help them push different initiatives into the schools to make sure that exposure is being given to the student athletes on as much of a fair basis as the conference can provide. It doesn’t all fall in her hands though. Each school has a person that is responsible to help push the envelope. A lot of the work is handled on campus. Each school has its Sport Information Director (SID) and a lot of the information is filtered through them.

“If I have any campaigns that we’re going to spearhead on the conference level then I filter that information down to the schools and they reach out to the

media that covers them on a regular basis,” Shera says. “A good portion of our media follows us throughout the year. They know when it’s time to get geared up for the tournament. There is a small segment that comes just for the tournament since it has grown to the point where it’s an event and more than just a basketball tournament. It’s a lot of work but I enjoy it, it’s what I look forward to the most.”

Regardless of the long hours and the amount of work, Shera puts the pedal to the floor. While working with media powerhouses such as ESPN, Shera is able to gain a lot of knowledge from as well. After 10 years of working with the conference, she still accomplished her goal of learning something from them every year the team works together. For the rest of the year outside of the week of the tournament, it’s staying ahead of the curve.

With technology at what we perceive as a pinnacle, everyone has almost equal access to the latest technology and it’s like a 24 hour business now. You are never off and stories break in the middle of the night and you have to be on call. It takes some getting use to. Nevertheless, Shera gives an amazing amount of credit to the commissioner of the CIAA, Leon Kerry.

“Even though he’s not where the young generation is as far as being on top of all the technology, he’s very open to experimenting and to using the newest whatever it is,” Shera explains. “Between our office and the public relations firm we hire to help us, we all put our heads together and we all help each other to keep abreast. The reason why we’ve been so successful is because the commissioner is willing to do that. When you’re willing to be the first to do something and not fearful, you set the curve for everything else.” **S**

To learn more about the CIAA, visit www.theciaa.com

The SUAVV Spoon:

Cafeteria



I never forget a restaurant that introduces me to a new gastronomic experience; good OR bad. In the case of Chelsea's Cafeteria Restaurant and Lounge (somewhat repetitive name?)—a 24 hour upscale diner that on weekend nights seems more like a club than a place to dine, complete with burly bouncer at the door and a line to get in—I have one word to say...mussels. Spectacular.

I have always had a somewhat skeptical approach to certain types of seafood, mostly from a visual perspective of the living creature. Lobsters and shrimp remind me of some insects; octopus are, well, octopus...and don't get me started on the day that I first saw what a catfish looked like and where it came from. However, this subtle revulsion has

always been coupled with a healthy appetite and a true love of seafood, and also, an adventurous spirit that sometimes twists my inner Virgo prude to try everything ONCE. Well, almost everything.

I have been to Cafeteria quite a few times, and it's more mainstream fare has always been consistently good, from the beautifully presented Burger Platters (I get the Turkey version as I do not digest Beef well, great reports for both however) to the amazing grilled Mahi Mahi, adequately served with a wilted spinach side and chorizo rice and beans cirquette, and topped with a flavorful spicy salsa verde. But surprisingly, it is the magnificent Prince Edward Island Mussels, an appetizer that tops the list for me.



I'll say this, before Cafeteria, I had never had mussels, nor any desire to try them, but this 'Prince Edward Island Mussel', aptly named after the island in which they are harvested, completely changed my view. I'll confess that I had a delightful 'Autumn Sangria' drink, a wonderful concoction of a Cabernet and Apple Cider that spurred my bravery to try the Mussel dish.

Superbly presented in a deep soup bowl with an extra plate for the shells, the mussels are simply steamed in a fragrant wine cream sauce, and heavily accented with fresh garlic, green onion and fresh cherry tomatoes. They are served with a thick slice of garlic ciabatta bread, of which you can have a

quickly served extra slice, if your stomach so dictates. For me, a side salad (shared because it's quite big) of baby spinach tossed with honey Dijon vinaigrette and maple pancetta, completed this meal. The wine list is well populated, and the Prince von Hessen Reisling I had, rounded this meal off adequately.

Did I forget to mention that Cafeteria is a venerable celebrity spotter venue as well? LL Cool J, NeNe Leakes (Housewives of Atlanta), Lady GaGa, Brandy, Jessica Simpson, Perez Hilton – I've witnessed all of them at one point or another being human, and enjoying the food and the European chic ambience of Cafeteria; but only for a hot minute.

Because trust me, once they bring your dish to the table, all focus is on the food. **S**

Cafeteria Restaurant & Lounge –
119 Seventh Avenue (@ 17th Street),
New York, 212-414-1190

The SUAVV Spoon: Sugarcane



Having sampled many a Caribbean dish at various Brooklyn restaurants since moving to New York, all claiming to have the 'best' in calypso fare; and being disappointed time and time again by either the inconsistency of the meal(s), or just badly prepared food in general, it was with some hesitation that I ventured into the highly recommended Sugarcane Restaurant almost six years ago for a birthday dinner that almost didn't happen. A forty five minute wait, compounded by a Friday night battle with the Labor Day weekend crowd, marked my party's arrival, and I grouchily settled into a couch corner prepared to have a swift, polite bite with my friends, and make a speedy exit.

Four magnificent sorrel mojitos later, grounded by one of the best 'bake' and fish sandwiches (a fried fish sandwich served with about five different condiments ranging from spicy to sweet and a side salad) I've had in years, served by a fabulous waitress, and also finding out that one of the owners was an old school friend of mine I hadn't seen in twenty plus years - I was still my seat, exhilarated, sated, and having the time of my life. I have not looked back since.

With a soundtrack that alternates between calypso, reggae and hip-hop, that sets the energy level of this restaurant ablaze, décor that includes tropical flora and black & white historical lithographs on the walls, and a vibrant menu that reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the Trinidadian heritage, Sugarcane is one of those rare anomalies where I can truly say; it's worth the wait, it's worth the while. With entries like 'Bacchanal Chicken' 'Sugarcane Braised Oxtails' and 'Plantain Crusted Snapper', washed down with either a 'Mango Martini' or a 'Passion Fruit Caipirinha'; who's quibbling over a short wait for a table? Lesson – good food is never 'fast' food! My most recent excursion to the restaurant exemplified that fact.

I decided to go with a seafood route this time, and started with an appetizer of the Sugarcane Shrimp, followed by Creole King Fish with a side of Macaroni Pie and Mixed Greens infused with flavor nuances that assail the palate in a cacophony of taste orgasms. The shrimp was a joy to behold as well as consume, thoroughly slicked with the 'secret sauce' (which my ever discerning palate gave away as a

tangy mix of cilantro, lemon and probably brown sugar). The King Fish could not have been more perfectly cooked, grilled with the right amount of fresh thyme (although a little too many onions to remove) and the Macaroni Pie. Words fail me at this take on the many versions of 'mac and cheese' that this time, however, was baked and cut in a hot solid square, in which I detected the slightest hint of Dijon mustard.

Sorrel, a traditional Caribbean holiday drink prepared from the fruit/ flowers of the Roselle plant (a species of hibiscus) was the flavouring of choice for my exotic mojito. A perfect balance of tart and sweet, balanced with the refreshing bite of the fresh mint, this drink is one to be reckoned with and deceptively leads one to order seconds, not realizing how potent the liquor content is!

If you desire a quiet, balmy night, with a meat in cream sauce type of meal and some quiet storm music in the background...DON'T go to Sugarcane. If you want to energize your evening with a Caribbean flair and rid your hunger with a well rounded

and tasty dish, put your best Brooklyn face on and jet to 238 Flatbush Avenue with gusto! **S**

Sugarcane Restaurant – Caribbean/ Trinidadian Cuisine/ Park Slope/ 238 Flatbush Ave Brooklyn, NY
718-230-3954



Sandy Oasis:

Bermuda

Ok, sure we've all heard about the Bermuda Triangle and how people, planes, and boats disappear when traveling in the vicinity. Frankly, I don't mind disappearing for a little while on a sandy oasis. This beautiful tropical island (that sits less than 2 hours off of the shore of the east coast in the Atlantic Ocean) is a very affordable and relaxing voyage to seize.

Referring to Bermuda as an "island," is very common. It is in fact composed of approximately 180 islands, linked by bridges, and divided into nine picturesque parishes. But all of the islands feature amazing beaches and some of the most beautiful wildlife that you will ever see.

Culturally, the resort island is a blend of colonial history and African heritage. Being Britain's oldest colony, its influence continues to dominate the government, educational and legal institutions. If you see a man walking around with an old white wig on, he's not imitating The Old City Actors of Philadelphia. He may just be the judge.

African influences, while subtler, can be found in dance and music, especially reggae, calypso and the rhythm of the Gombeyes. You are able to explore more about this rich past in the African Diaspora Heritage Trail. This self-guided tour from one tip of our island to the other along the trail will help travelers and learn about the legacy of scandal, rebellion and emancipation of the country. The Islands history of slavery and bondage ended by 1834. See the slave graveyard at St. Peter's, one of the oldest churches on the island. And imagine the "laborers" who helped build the most important British naval base in the Atlantic.

Below: The Dockyard at the far west end of the island, Built by slave and convict labour, the became a strategic outpost for the Royal Navy more than 200 years ago. In fact, British war ships set sail from this dock to attack Washington, DC during the War of 1812.





Above: The Bermuda Maritime Museum is set within a sprawling six-acre fortress at the edge of the Royal Naval Dockyard. Here your family can explore an old munitions warehouse and the world's first wrought iron house, while taking in stunning views from the ramparts. Children love crossing the moat into our largest fort.

Bermuda Maritime Museum

The Keep, Royal Naval Dockyard

Sandys Parish

Tel: +1 441 234 1418

Web: www.bmm.bm

Hours: 9:30am–4:30pm daily, except Christmas Day

Admission: BM\$10 (adults), BM\$8 (seniors), BM\$5 (children ages 5–15)

Left: Located 46.6M / 120FT underground, Crystal Caves is one of the largest cave systems on the island. Its dramatic stalactites and stalagmites will astonish and inspire every member of your family. Children will love the chance to pan for hidden gems at Captain Jack's Treasure Trove.

Crystal Caves

8 Crystal Caves Road

Hamilton Parish

Tel: +1 441 293 0640

Fax: +1 441 293 7334

Hours: 9:30am – 4:30pm daily except New Year's

Day, Good Friday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day

and Boxing Day

Admission: BM\$14 (adults), BM\$8 (children ages 5–12), under 5 free

Combination ticket to both Crystal and Fantasy Caves: BM\$20

(adults),

BM\$10 (child)



Laying Down The Blueprint

Kirk Franklin



Written: Michael Letterlough, Jr. |
Photos Courtesy of Penguin Books

“Talking and communicating is not a very difficult thing for me,” Kirk Franklin says on this early afternoon, just about a month shy of his first book release. “My natural personality is just to run my mouth. I think I run my mouth too much anyway... it’s like I’m always talking.”

And he is. The three-time, Grammy Award-winning artist isn’t making any false claims. In the past, he’s talked about his troubled life through music, on the radio and even on the couch of the talk-show queen herself, Oprah Winfrey. So it’s certainly not surprising that he would continue to articulate himself in his latest project, “The Blueprint.”

It’s been a busy day for Kirk already, but he’s reveling in the excitement of talking about his new book. “The Blueprint,” he says, was his way of addressing the increasingly negative image of Christianity today and many of the so-called Christians we, as society, see representing it.

“For a lot of people, (Christianity) seems unreal; it seems faked, it seems not true, it doesn’t seem gully or relevant and so my desire was to write from a bibliocentric pen to the cats that have been turned off and are turned down, but at the same time, it is clearly Christian in my approach. So it’s not to the right and it’s not as much left; [it has] spiritual swag I guess you can say.”

Kirk seems to have a knack for taking what tradition has maintained for years and presenting it in a new way to mainstream America. When he first stomped his way onto the gospel scene, his music was quickly embraced by young people everywhere, yet ridiculed by those who didn’t favor the secular sound blended with what they considered to be traditional gospel music. But Kirk isn’t afraid to take the road less traveled. The truth is, whether anyone likes it or not, he continues to come out on top. It’s why he doesn’t have a problem sharing the most intimate details of his life to the world, or pulling open the curtain to some of Christianity’s indiscretions.

“I’ve always been a person on a journey trying to find the truth,” Kirk shares. “I think that when you

live most of your life in the darkness you become one who becomes deeply hungry for an appetite of light.” He gathers his thoughts for a second, and continues, “I hope that even in my honesty and my boldness, that whatever I said [in my book] was said in a way to try to get to a place of resolve; to try to get to a place of healing, and [understand] that it wasn’t some kind of attack, or just about the faith or those that represent the faith.”

Kirk is smart. While he might admittedly be a chatter-bug, he knows how easily things can get misconstrued. He quickly makes a point highlighting for readers one particular chapter mentioning how proud he is of the Christian faith and his upbringing within the church walls, but “before I started to have a really in depth discussion about some of its cracks I had to create this balance of truth and love, which is always a difficult balance. So if that becomes offensive to people, hopefully through the journey of the book they’ll see that my motives and my attempts were not to do that.”

It’s a journey that includes taking readers through his early years—a period in his life he shares was shadowed by abandonment, loneliness and a number of bad influences. He was left to be raised by his aunt, Gertrude, after being deserted by his mother as a baby. And despite the difficulties he went through as a child (including, what he explained, an early exposure to pornography, which he’s openly revealed developed into a long-term, adult addiction) “I always had things around me that would cushion the blows.” And music was one of them.

It was his way of escaping from reality when everything else seemed to be wrong. There was even a piano that sat in the front of his aunt’s house, directly below the floor where his room was located above. By the age of four, Kirk was already drawn to its smooth, ivory keys and meticulously tuned sound, and with the help of his aunt, started taking piano lessons to hone his skills.

“It became a very close friend,” he says. “As a small child, especially since the house was only filled with me and Gertrude, me and that piano in the front of

“I remember just climbing on top of the roof at night as a little kid and singing up to the sky. And I [would] have little kid tears dropping down my cheek.”

the house became very, very close. Whether it was all the things that happened to me as a child—being introduced to a lot of very adult things; or whether it was with other kids in the neighborhood, it was always music and Gertrude’s faith that was this combination that seemed to give me a sense of hope.

“Like, I remember just climbing on top of the roof at night as a little kid and singing up to the sky. And I [would] have little kid tears dropping down my cheek,” he remembers. “I just really had a very unique relationship, even as a little kid...that’s what gave me sanity.”

One thing Kirk has never done was lose his faith. But he explains it wasn’t necessarily his faith in the church—an institution he admits is certainly damaged, but not completely lost—rather just his faith in God that carried him through. It’s a very matter-of-fact statement, but then again, almost everything he says is. With Kirk there are no generalizations, illusions or false appearances—just the truth.

“Hopefully (people) will see a brother that’s not afraid to put himself on the front line of the war and take some bullets,” he says. “To be able to say, I’m taking off my Superman uniform and I’m becoming Clark Kent. This is my jump, these are my mistakes, these are my mess-ups and by God’s grace I’m here.”

Through grace and love Kirk says he’s been able to stay away from such things like infidelity and he’s been able to be a good father to his children. He’s also working on forgiveness and trying to heal the wounds still left open by his mother and father. “It

was a very difficult situation, so for me it just brings up those childhood pains. That’s why I say I am a work in progress. But I think it’s very important to say so that people out there that are struggling with forgiveness can see that they’re not by themselves and that this is a process.”

One important thing to know about Kirk is that he doesn’t do any of this because he has to. It’s simply because, as he says, he’s free to love, and “when I’m introduced to love, then my foundation is spun from this place of total freedom.”

It’s in the personally crafted pages of “The Blueprint” Kirk wants others to feel the same. More than anything, he hopes that by sharing his experiences it will help others be able to pull through their own life’s storm and find new faith and strength.

“You never know how stuff helps people,” he says. “Sometimes it comes from just planting a seed that grows over time and over the years, or it could be something that you say that transforms a person’s situation overnight. The only thing I can do is just pray that it’s God’s will that this can be something that can impact people on a level that’s very deep and very honest.” **S**

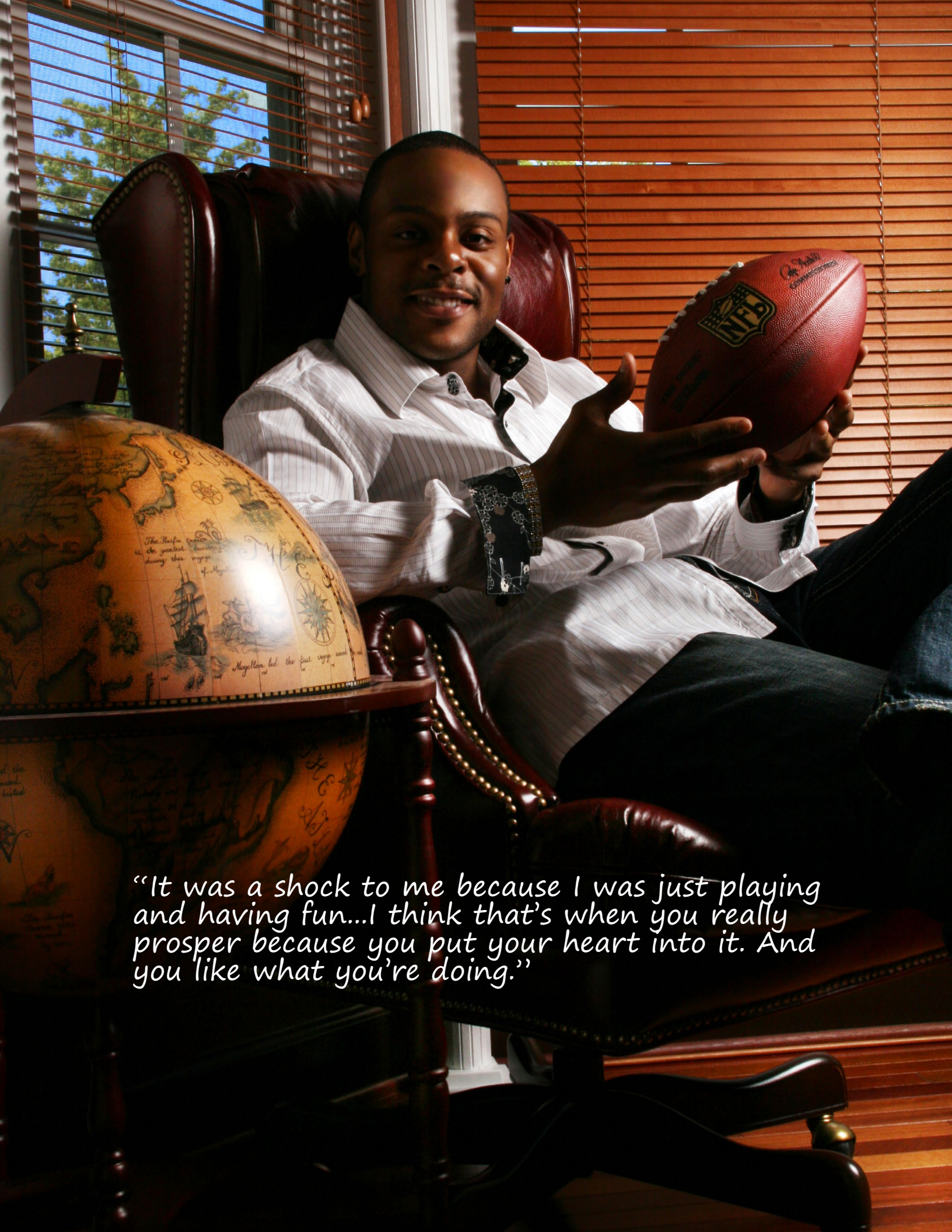


In The Game

Visanthe Shiancoe

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos: Michael Letterlough, Jr.





"It was a shock to me because I was just playing and having fun...I think that's when you really prosper because you put your heart into it. And you like what you're doing."

Visanthe Shiancoe really gets into a zone when he's playing Mortal Kombat vs. Dc Comics on his Sony Playstation 3. It's probably comparable to the same zone he gets in on the field for the Minnesota Vikings playing his tight end position. What makes it even more interesting, is that he's not just playing against the system, but with a real person connected somewhere out in cyber space.

"This is where it goes down right here," Visanthe says about his enormously spacious basement, where he spends countless hours playing video games, watching movies and eating snacks that get left in his favorite chair in the room.

These days, Visanthe, like many athletes, takes refuge in his home and competing with unknowing fans and potential fantasy football owners. But that's a far cry from who he was as a kid. Like many of us, his days were spent playing football in the middle of a street mimicking the abilities of gridiron greats John Riggins, Joe Theisman, and Art Monk hoping a car wouldn't ruin one of the best plays of their childhood. With the progression from little league through high school, he took his pigskin skills to Morgan State University. This was the point in his life where he not only played football but entered into the game of life through the eyes of the Historically Black University...an experience that attendees have always been very fond of.

"The camaraderie, the closeness, just knowing that someone can relate (to you) in that time of growing and getting to know yourself and to know that someone grew up the same way that you have, and have experienced the same things that I have," Visanthe explains. "They really teach you how to deal with adversity. A Division 1 AA school there's more that you have to do and handle on your own. Things aren't really given and the roads aren't really paved for you so you have to create a lot of opportunities yourself."

That's exactly what Visanthe did. In a team meeting when his coach announced that he could be drafted to the NFL in the second round, he knew it was time to really put things into gear. Up until this point,

football was a gift and a way to be competitive. The future star was more focused on school and becoming an IT Specialist soon after graduation. He was applying for internships and going to job fairs. But in that instance, he knew that it was time to take football a lot more serious.

"It was a shock to me because I was just playing and having fun," Visanthe reflects. "I think that's when you really prosper because you put your heart into it. And you like what you're doing. All of the ins and outs are already there. All of the pre requisites are there because your heart is there. I was always in the weight room and working out and preparing my body. I am glad I had the teammates around me to help prepare me because we all had that fire."

After the countless hours of training for the NFL combine and the traveling along with the struggle of maintaining a healthy balance of school and football, the fate of Visanthe's professional career was in the hands of general managers and recommendations from the coaches and scouts whose hearts he was playing to win over.

The night of the draft, Visanthe's Maryland home was shared with 20-30 of closest friends and family as they anticipated every approach of the NFL Draft podium wondering if his name would be called. Finally, in the third round, he received a phone call from the Dallas Cowboys who told him that he was the next pick from them. Yet, that pick went to Jason Whitten who was still ironically in the pickings. The Philadelphia Eagles took on the powerhouse TE LJ Smith. After a few moments, the phone rang again. It was the New York Giants. Unbeknownst to him, they had been watching him and his development. So after hours upon days of sitting on pins and needles before and during the draft, Visanthe decided it was time to share the news with the room.

"I held the speaker of the phone and I said "I'm a New York Giant" and they went crazy," Visanthe says with a smile from ear to ear. "I had to run out of the room. To explain it in words...relief, mesmerized, unbelievable, surreal, and an out of body experience. That feeling is still with me right now in so

many ways. You always want to recreate that feeling somehow. But, one thing about me is that I don't linger around a potential situation too long. I get into it to make sure that the situation that I'm in gets my full attention."

After a few seasons with the Giants, Visanthe was a free agent. He had an amazing few years as a backup to Jeremy Shockey. Beginning to come into his own on the field and developing a level of comfort, caught the attention of Minnesota Vikings coach Brad Childress. Childress recruited him and eventually arranged him to have his talents relocated under his direction in Minnesota. This was a hell of an adjustment for Visanthe. He wasn't used to playing the lead role for an organization as well as becoming a pass catching tight end. It was no surprise that he struggled and his mindset was completely off. All of this would have remained the same had it not been for his exit interview with Childress.

"I started blaming everybody else," Visanthe begins to explain. "But I said, 'hey coach but do you have my back' (because I was feeling like I was by myself). He told me yeah. I started putting in 110 percent. I was catching balls and doing extra routes and drills. I started practicing my craft. Once I started seeing it on the field, it clicked in my head. It's almost like you go crazy a little bit. I yearned to get that feeling and the results. I loved that transition. I started running with it. And I still don't feel that I'm to my fullest potential yet. Nowhere near it. You can look and say 'wow, how did he make that catch' but for me that's something that I'm practicing every day."

Saying that hard work has paid off for Visanthe is an understatement. What we see as fans of the NFL as well as other professional sports are the games. We tend to think that the League consists of just games and practices. That's simply not the case, there are team meetings, position meetings, trainings, practices, tape reviews, playbook reviews, public appearances, interviews, and if you're lucky, endorsement shootings, meetings and appearances, on top of the family time, personal time, and typical fan time. Needless to say, the hardest part of being in the

NFL for Visanthe is time on top of the expectations.

"A lot of lives are depending on what you do whether you're performing or not," Visanthe explains. "It's stressful. No matter what a player says, he knows that he's not only representing himself, it's his family, wife, brother, the organization, fans, the NFL. You want to represent yourself the best way possible. You want to be a true competitor. There are a lot of people out there that just want to get paid. But usually those people just fall off."

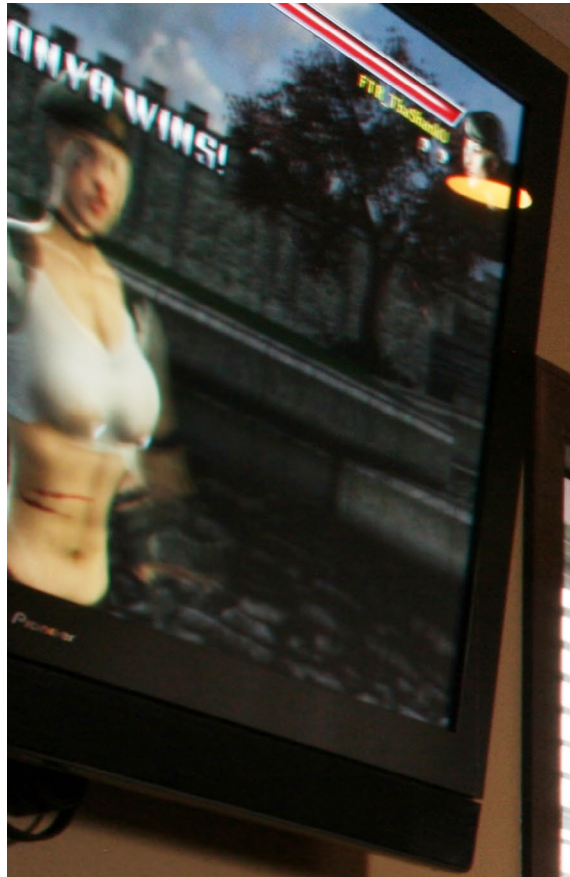
Knowing that he will never fall into the fall off category, Visanthe cringes at the thought of being injured and not playing football anymore. So much to the point that when the question was asked, he began looking for wood to know on to try to fend off the superstition that could come with the near mention of the word in which we shall not repeat. Nonetheless, there is a back-up plan. Delving into a few franchising opportunities and what he calls "Safe business with safe returns", the self-proclaimed food connoisseur plans to turn what has been a season of recording, into a possible full time career. Television and food.

Okay, don't squint your eyes so much. He's not going to be in the kitchen cooking, screaming "BAM" and pouring white wine into all of his dishes. The idea is to go into Broadcast Journalism in some form. He is far from shy when it comes to the cameras, which his show 'What's Eating Visanthe' showed this season. Every week, he took cameras and Minnesota's KARE 11 Sports Journalist Dave Schwartz to a different restaurant where they ate some of Visanthe's favorite foods.

"My mom is Liberian and my dad is from Ghana but lived in Liberia. People laugh when I say this. My tribe in Liberia is the Mandingo tribe. No Pun Intended," he says laughing referencing to his live locker room exposure a little while back. "Tall, broad shoulders, slim, fairly muscular. Visanthe isn't an African name, it's Asian Indian. My mom promised the wife of the Indian Ambassador of Liberia to name her first son after him after he passed. She loved that man. They were all really good friends. Its

"I said, 'hey coach but do you have my back' (because I was feeling like I was by myself). He told me yeah. I started putting in 110 percent. I was catching balls and doing extra routes and drills. I started practicing my craft."





pronounced Vi-san-th, but the Indians say Vi-san-tay. Visanthe Odai Shiancoe. My mom says Vi-san-th.”

There are few people in the world that we live that have the ability and opportunity to do what Visanthe Shiancoe is blessed to do day in and day out. The chances of becoming a professional athlete are lower than the chances of becoming a heart surgeon. And he realizes that. It's the reason that he doesn't take his career for granted. This is why he trains as hard as he does, and give back to those that want to follow in his footsteps. It's the reason that he travels from Maryland to Minnesota throughout the year to work, compete, and entertain. However, he is smart enough to keep his focus short as well as long term. Goals have steps, not elevators.

“All I can do is control what I can,” Visanthe says confidently. “Of Course God is number one. If you

don't feel like you are the best at what you do, you can't bust through to that next level that you're trying to get to. You have to be able to fight through the turbulence to get to the cruise control. First you have to conquer the level you're at. If you're worrying about level 10 and you're on level 2, you're going to hurt yourself. You have to conquer and then raise the bar and repeat. You can't bask in the glory. You'll get left behind.” **S**

To watch episodes of 'What's Eating Visanthe' visit his site at www.visanthesiancoe.com

"If you don't feel like you are the best at what you do, you can't bust through to that next level that you're trying to get to."





The Jet-Setter

Will Dalton

Words: Rashod Davenport

Photos: Submitted By Will Dalton

Will Dalton knew at an early age that he was an entertainer growing up in the small town of Eden, North Carolina. Once a video camera came out, the five-year-old, shy kid would become the star of the room. However, it wasn't until he entered his freshman year in college when the "filler" theatre arts class would display his natural ability. While simply making everyone laugh, his professor at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina, approached with the suggestion of switching majors from Marketing to Theatre. Will nicely told him that he didn't want to be a broke out of work actor, not knowing that he would ever really get into acting. Overall, he was fearful of having a degree and not being able to use it.

As his school progressed, Will decided to begin modeling. After a few assignments, his agent landed him a job shooting a regional commercial for Progress Energy. It was this moment that he realized he could actually be an actor. He was about 20-years-old and he was slated to be an extra on set. "When I got to the set they put me in front of cam-

eras and had me all in the make-up chairs," Will replays. "I was like 'What the hell is going on' but I didn't stop them either (laughing). So, when the shooting was over my agent called me and asked me what the hell I did. I thought I did something wrong. He was like 'How did you bump up to a principle on set?' That was my first ever job. I got residuals for like 3 years and the commercial went national."

With the motivation gained from the commercial, Will began to work with projects around North Carolina. Eventually, he attended the National Black Theatre Festival where he linked up with Nathaniel Jacobs, the founder of the West Coast Black Theatre Troupe in Sarasota, Florida. The relationship would lead Will to his breakout moment while performing "A Soldiers Play" at the Historic Asolo Theatre. Following the performance of a Black rooted play and Sarasota is a predominantly White town, Will joined the cast as they ventured into the lobby to meet the audience. His confirmation would come within that meet and greet.

“This lady came up to me, she’s probably 70’s and her mom is with her and she’s pushing 90 and some change,” Will explains. “Her mom couldn’t speak so she was talking for her. And she said ‘we’ve been traveling all over the united stated for the past couple of years just watching plays, your performance in this play is one of the best if not the best that we’ve seen.’ I was like wow. I couldn’t say anything but ‘I humbly say thank you.’ I’m not saying I wasn’t great or that the play wasn’t great. I thought we were pretty good but that’s what she said to me and that let me know that our job as actors or entertainers is bigger than what we see because were affecting people lives.”

There is one person that impacts Wills life on a higher level, his wife, Candice. Even though not in the entertainment industry, Candice makes sure that she is being the biggest supporter of his career, dreams, goals, and aspirations, she makes sure that they share the vision. For instance, the play was in Sarasota, Florida. Will lives in Winston Salem, North Carolina. He spent 4 months on the tour of the play. When he has to come to Los Angeles, he is gone for the same duration if not longer. Instead of complaining on either side about the amount of traveling, they look at the opportunities in the same way that we look at gifts from God. God’s going to give you gifts and if you don’t use them, He’s going to take them away. In comparison, if you get an opportunity, you might as well take it because if you don’t, it’s taken away and somebody else is going to take the opportunity.

“If the opportunity is meant for you, it’s meant for you,” Will emphasizes’. “Just do it and everything else will just fall into place. So for me to leave my home state and do a job, I don’t worry about it because I know I am there for a reason. It’s easy for me, it’s a job, that’s what I do. Leaving home is the least of my issues. I love everybody as far as my family, my wife, and all but when I have to go I have to go and they understand that. I don’t think it’s hard. I think a lot of people assume it’s hard from the outside looking in. It’s nothing because she flies out to see me on a weekend or whatever. That’s

what we do. As long as we know and we can prepare, were fine. I feel like I have a leg up on anybody now. It makes me feel good to know that she sees the bigger picture too. She makes me see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

When dealing with the entertainment industry at any capacity, the majority of fall backs and road blocks can be summed up to one aspect...networking. Hollywood is no different from any other industry. Your talents will take you far and your abilities are your bread and butter. However, if you're not in front of the right faces and the decision makers, those butter sandwiches will start to be a little less filling. For Will it's a little more challenging. Not only is he not a local of LA, he's a new face.

Granted, being a new face can have its benefits as well. Every now and then the film industry needs that fresh face and that unfamiliar persona to allow a role to take its full character. In those instances it is great. On the flip side, when you don't know someone, regardless of their credentials and abilities, you just don't know them. Instead of being intimidated by the inner circles of the industry, Will knows that it's only a matter of time before they get to know the person that he is.

“If you work with someone and they like you and they get along with you, more than likely, you're going to get hired for another job,” Will explains. “Once they know me that will change. With guys that have don't enormous amounts of jobs and that have that support system of directors and casting directors that they know that will look out for them, it's a challenge. I'm not intimidated at all because I know what I can bring to the table. There's a lot of people in L.A. who studied at Julliard. They can dance, they can sing, they are triple and quadruple threats and that's great I support what they do. At the end of the day, I don't believe that you can duplicate what I can do.”

Will is a multi-talented person. He's athletic, funny, an actor, and has a hell of a drive. There is one place that he should hand over the crown...singing. On the set of his current project with Big Owl Productions, 'The Prodigal', which is a modern day

“I have to challenge her to a singing contest,” He says laughing. “They be frontin’ on me like I can’t sing. Which I can’t but it’s cool. I’m gonna rap, she can’t beat me in that.”



version of the prodigal son story, Will is playing opposite of singing powerhouse and co-producer of the venture Angie Stone. It's a story about love, triumph, redemption, miracles, blessings, and some sad moments. One of the saddest moments is when Will decides that during the quiet time on set, he's slated to become a singer. "I have to challenge her to a singing contest," He says laughing. "They be frontin' on me like I can't sing. Which I can't but it's cool. I'm gonna rap, she can't beat me in that."

Luckily for the set of the independent film 'Recoiled' with director Rukiya Shantil, he's nowhere near a microphone, but he does get pretty comfortable with a gun. In a 'CRASH'-like film, the entire plot revolves around a single gun that links all of the stories together. Between these two projects and the reoccurring success of the Don B. Welch production 'Love Buddies'—which gained a deal to be turned into a movie that Will hopes the studios will allow

him to remain on— Will has been inspired to lead off into his own project.

"I've written 6 short scripts and storyboarded them out," Will explains. "What I want to do is an Online Sketch Comedy Show from the days of In Livin' Color and the Chapelle Show. I have a very twisted mind. So it's going to be very politically incorrect. It's pretty funny. I have some stuff pushing the envelope and I don't want to tick anybody off but I have some stuff that I hope isn't going to tick anybody off. I have a way of doing it. Whatever the joke is, I'm gonna make sure the punch-line is a REALLY good one." **S**





Just Dance

Olivia Wales

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos: Sir Miles Davis

The art of dance is a moment when an individual is able to express their emotion without ever opening their mouth. You embody all of the pain, happiness, frustration, worry, stress, and joy into movement with precision and candor. Olivia Wales found her expression at the very early age of 3 nestled in her mothers' dance studio in Phoenix, Arizona. As she danced with her older and younger sister and persisted to dance after they both quit, she found her mother to be the biggest supporter of her dreams... Even when the decisions could be painful.

After noticing a backwards 's' on the 'Merry Christmas' hanging that Olivia put up in the house, her mother began to look further into her daughters' educational needs. She found that Olivia's homework and school assignments had backwards letters and numbers. After being tested by her school counselor, Olivia was diagnosed with Dyslexia.

At a time where being "one of the cool kids" is the most important aspect of a day to many, Olivia was spending time in special classes to help her learn to work within her disorder. Needless to say, she didn't feel cool, she felt embarrassed. By the time she entered high school, it was more of a back thought than a challenge. Not because things got easier, but because it was too much. She began to not care about school and to delved more into her creative side and dance.

Nonetheless, Olivia was certain that she wanted to train bigger and harder at her gift. Therefore, she began to visit colleges. After an amazing audition, the scholarship was sitting on the table, but once they saw the high school transcripts, the school began to pull the scholarship back towards them. For the dance department, seeing what kind of talent they were dealing with, they were not willing to just take "No" for an answer. They had many meetings with the academic department, set her up with tutors and specialists, picked the first semester of classes, and Olivia was attending The University of Arizona as a dance major. By the third day of class, she realized that this chapter in life would probably be the most difficult.

"I was like 'Get me out of here, I don't even want to do this'," Olivia explains. "There were so many people in my class, I wasn't used to that. My parents warned me, 'It's going to be hard, don't worry we're going to get you special attention, you're good'. They [her parents] were like 'Olivia's going to do it'

and I was like 'Yeah, afraid not'—I struggled. I went to my special classes and did my work and had them help me throughout my academics. Then, I'd be like 'Yes, my dance class!'. Go into my dance and talk to my teacher's about it, they're like 'Just keep fighting you'll be fine, you can do this...'—I was just like 'I'm not doing this anymore. Two more years of this hell? No way. I'm good'."

After some serious thought and contemplation, Olivia turned to a book that she created with photos of everyplace that she wanted to visit in the world as well as everything she wanted to do. She found comfort in herself and told her parents that she was going to leave school and travel the world as a dancer—her lifetime goal and her two favorite things to do. Like many parents' the first of the questions were "How are you going to support yourself again? How are you going to do this?" Although Olivia didn't have a plan, she knew that it would work. One day, she found an audition for World Caribbean Cruise Ship. She packed her apartment into a storage unit, and never turned back.

SUAVV: After you toured the world country by country and at sea, you landed in New York City and signed to the biggest and most recognized Dance Agency in the world McDonald Selznick Associates (MSA). How did that happen?

Olivia: When I came here, I started taking every single dance class that I could at Broadway Dance Center, meeting every single dancer that I could and just asking them questions. Picking their brain of everything I needed to know because I heard New York City is the toughest place in the world and I was like, "Here I am! This person that's from Arizona, been on a cruise ship around the world, but yet the biggest city you know? Here I am. I don't know what I'm doing." I was shocked and scared, everything that could be felt, I was feeling. I met a couple of people that were like, "Wow, you're amazing! You're dope! You're a good dancer!" and I actually had a friend, Kelly Peters, who was already signed with MSA brought me to them. He contacted MSA and said "I have this dope dancer, you should check her out". An MSA agent came to one of the classes I was taking, watched me dance and they're like "Here's your contract!" and I was freaking out. I couldn't believe it! I was like, "That was easy! I can survive in New York, this is good..." No. New York is hard. It really is.



into the auditions and the castings with thousands of girls that are dope, that are great dancers. It took me a little bit to feel out the industry, the auditions, to see how it works and then I started booking jobs and it's like "I'm making it, I'm making it".

SUAVV: Is that when you felt like you were successful as a dancer? Or, are you still striving to what successful is?

Olivia: I'm always striving to be the most amazing dancer. I feel like I'm a great dancer, I'm passionate, love it without a doubt in my heart--so I don't think I'll ever be complete or think that I'm "that best dancer". There's always that better thing. There are always those younger dancers coming up. I have to step my game up that much more.

SUAVV: What's the hardest part of being a dancer?

Olivia: The hardest part for me is the ability to pick up choreography quick. A lot of auditions they teach it quick, you have to know it, and deliver that "wow" and give it your all and that's the hardest part. It comes from my dyslexia. So I'm trying to learn it as quick as possible and do the whole style part and deliver it at the same time, that's definitely the hardest part for me going into auditions, I know that for a fact. I'm like, the one that's working extra hard on the side to learn that and everyone else is chilling, waiting to audition and I'm like "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven!" and do it over and over again.

SUAVV: There's no preview for an audition? It's not like you go in, watch someone do it, and then they leave?

Olivia: The majority of auditions, you get numbers or groups. You go in, there's a choreographer there, they're like "Ok, you're going to learn this much"--they show it. Maybe once, maybe twice, or maybe they'll go over it a couple times and then you've got to know it. Either they'll audition you right away, right then and there, or you walk out and you have time to review it. If you don't know it, you're like "Well, I don't really know it but I'm going to go in there and not stop what I'm doing" and you just...

SUAVV: Freestyle?

Olivia: (Laughing) Freestyle! Exactly! That's what I do! I've done a couple auditions where I didn't know

SUAVV: That's a sign of how important networking can be. A lot of people think getting signed or getting a contract is the automatic in for the industry, is that true?


Olivia: No. When you go to auditions with an agency backing, the casting people look at that and say 'Oh she's good, she's obviously signed with an agency', so now you got to show what you're worth. You got to give it your all in order for you to get the job because everyone's doing that, everyone's signed with an agent because a lot of auditions in New York are agency auditions where you have to be with an agent to go to these auditions. You've got to make a name for yourself, that's for sure. To go

“Every time I’m on stage in front of an audience and seeing those people scream and get excited about things, that feeling of those people looking at me --I just want to like, cry.”

what I was doing. I didn’t get it. But you know what? I’m not going to quit. No such thing to me as a quitter so I’m just going to go in there and deliver the “wow“. No one’s going to kill my dreams.

SUAVV: (Laughing), and that’s what matters the most. You can never quit when you are following your dreams. Even if you’re freestyle dancing. Now, I know for a fact that you’re far from done. You’ve made it in NYC and you’re on the stages doing what you love. So what’s next?

Olivia: New York is full of everything I want to learn about music. I want to learn more about the fashion industry. I want to incorporate all of that into one. It’s just getting myself out there and telling everyone

who I am and what I am able to deliver. I want to keep striving to be that next amazing person. I want to do everything. Dance is obviously my number one passion. Every time I’m on stage in front of an audience and seeing those people scream and get excited about things, that feeling of those people looking at me --I just want to like, cry? It’s crazy. It’s a crazy feeling. And growing up having students I used to teach come up to me like “Oh my gosh! I want to be just like you!” it’s that feeling inside. It’s so amazing how people look up to you and you get that feeling. 





Christine Bax

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos: Submitted by Model

SUAVV *seductress*

SUAVV: So how long have you been a model and can you remember when you wanted to start? How did that happen?

Christina: As of 2009, I have been modeling for 5 years.

I've always loved art, fashion, film, and writing growing up, thanks to my mother who loved to shop; and my sister, who loved to draw. I started drawing and writing short stories/poems/novels as soon as I learned how to hold a pencil. I would often create sketches of beautiful women that I hoped to look like when I grew up, among other things. My career started off with a test shoot with a photographer that a friend of mine hooked me up with. I posted those images online, and from then on I was a model-booking numerous photo shoots which eventually led me to actual work. Music videos, indie films, CD covers, and websites, to name a few.

S: Being a model, do you find that guys are intimidated by your beauty?

C: I suppose so but I don't really understand why...I don't really see myself as someone who is "sexy" because I'm more of a tomboy. But I'm not sure if it's because I'm pretty or if it's because I speak well, which seems to throw a lot of people off. I definitely don't have low self-esteem, but I don't run around claiming that I'm God's gift to man either. I'm just always myself, and I am very humble and thankful to have what God gave me!

S: Have you had jealous boyfriends? How did you deal with that?

C: Absolutely! It's a very hard thing to deal with. Relationships are scary enough, and when I'm with someone who is trying to control me that much more, it makes me feel like I have to get out as fast as I can! I am a trustworthy girlfriend, and I trust whatever man I am with. It's amazing how jealous some significant others can be. If he gives me a reason not to trust him, then I opt to end the relationship right then and there. If you're with someone who doesn't trust you, and you don't trust him/her, then there's no point in continuing the relationship. Trust issues do not go away. I look at it this way... if there's someone else he'd rather be with, then let him be. I don't fight with other women over men,

and I don't want my man fighting with another man over me. If he has me, he has nothing to worry about!

S: What kind of girl are you? There is the "chill type." That's the girl that can hang with the fellas and still be a lady with her man. Then there is the "always sexy, girlie girl" type. That's the girl that always has to look good and will not do certain things because "sweat is nasty." I think you get the point.

C: Like I said before, I am definitely a tomboy (with manners and class!). I don't go as far as spitting on the ground or burping out loud, but I tend to like doing things that would seem to others "unconventional" for a woman to do-especially one who looks like me...whatever that means. It's just what people tell me. I work out a lot, so obviously sweating is no big deal. I like to play instruments, skateboard, play video games, play cards or dominoes, watch baseball, catch a good concert, and things of the sort. I've also been interested in getting into surfing and snowboarding. But oddly enough, I really can't stand hanging out with men sometimes...because no matter how much they tell you you're "one of the guys," you're really not. I don't want to hear about your nasty stories or your dirty sex jokes, or help you get chicks (I think men call it being a wing-woman or something)! I am still a female, and I like hanging out with other females. I just don't ever come across one who likes the same things as I do. Getting all dolled up and having a night on the town with my girlfriends is not something that excites me, and I'd probably do it once every two months, if even that. The most I ever dress up is when I'm doing a photo shoot or I have an important event to attend. And a dinner date, of course! I only feel the need to look super hot when it's necessary...no need to waste good makeup just to go to the store! I'm usually very calm and relaxed, so much so that I often come across as nonchalant. Many people's first impression of me is that I'm stuck up and bitchy, and I'm just the opposite. But that doesn't really bother me, I am who I am!

S: What type of guys are you attracted to?

C: I definitely like men who are extremely intelligent. Book smarts, common sense, and worldly knowledge is something that intrigues me. I like being with a man that I feel that I can learn something from and grow with. Also, he MUST be confident in every way-his career, his faith (whatever it may be), his looks, and his woman (me). For some reason, I am turned on by a man who is slightly arrogant. Someone like that makes me feel secure because he knows himself...ambiguity, insecurity, and indecisiveness is a HUGE turn-off. I believe it is possible to be all of these things (slight arrogance, confidence, smart) and still be grounded. Add being artistic in the mix, and that is my ideal man! Race is not an issue to me. As far as attraction goes, I notice a

man who obviously takes care of himself. But it's the conversation that will be the deciding factor! Somehow I always seem to end up with a musician... what's up with that?

S: How should a guy approach you? How shouldn't they?

C: In the longer relationships that I have had, I was always friends with the guy first, then the friendship developed into a relationship. I don't have flings or one night stands, because they are meaningless. Men nowadays are so much different than the men 20 years ago, naturally, as our society is always changing. But they are not different in a good way... it seems very common for people to hook up for a night or so, then go about their business. I know that most of the men who approach me have these intentions, and I can always tell. Some men will just flat out ask me for my number without even knowing my name, or ask me if I have a boyfriend. Wouldn't you want to know me first? To make sure I'm not the one who is crazy? It just makes sense... what else could he want? The worst is when a guy would ask me for my number and I would say, "sorry I have a man," and he would say, "I don't care about your man, I'm talking about me and you!" Or they'll ask me, "will he let you have friends?" What does that even mean?? It's just so funny, because they don't realize that some women actually read into that. I come back with, "If I was your woman would you let me have "friends"?" Then they have nothing to say cuz they know I'm right!

S: What is the best line that a guy said to you that worked? What was the worst?

C: I don't really pay attention to lines...they just go in one ear and out the other lately. It kinda sounds like white noise to me...you know when the cable goes out but the t.v. is still on?

S: What are you most embarrassed by?

C: My clumsiness. I bust my ass all the time, especially in public. I know it's not hot! But one doesn't really know me until he/she has seen me bust my ass at least once! At least I can be amusing if I'm not anything else!





S: What are some of the challenges that you face from day to day where you are from?

C: My biggest challenge lately is finding legitimate acting/modeling work. Here in Houston, credible sources are very limited, and I have worked with most, if not all of them. It tends to be very discouraging from time to time, especially when a deal falls through or someone flakes out. Unfortunately, that's just the way the game is. But when I make the big L.A. move, I know I will be successful because if you can succeed in Houston, you can succeed anywhere. There are a lot of people out there who would love to see me fail, and pretend to be genuinely interested in working with me, only to try and steer me in the wrong direction. I see it as a positive thing though, because if that weren't happening, I must be doing something wrong.

S: (You're not obligated to answer this one if you don't want to) How do you approach sex with men? Do you have a time rule?

C: I most definitely have a time rule. I will not go all the way unless I feel as if we are mutually in love

with each other, and I don't fall in love easily. I know it sounds cheesy, but that's the way I am! I've gone as long as 6 months without having sex. I know some women AND men out there who have gone much longer.

S: If you can do anything and money were not a factor, what would it be?

C: I'm already doing it! I can make as much or as little money as I want to. If I wanted to be filthy rich, there are lots of ways that I can do so, and relatively quickly. However, I'm not interested in getting rich quick schemes because there's no talent involved in it. I won't do or involve myself in something that I don't believe in or won't be proud of. My mind doesn't focus on ways to make money because I already know how to do that. My priorities are in my career, and perfecting every detail about it in every way possible, because that, not money, is what will remain a part of me. **S**

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Still Ray

Ray Vicente

Words: Rashod Davenport
Spread Photos: Michael Letterlough, Jr.
Main Photo: Alex Ade
Styling: Ray Vicente
Model: Z-nith Harvey



When it comes to menswear, there are very few designers that can give men something stylish that is also original. We are plagued with the remix of the same things over and over again. Jeans are always jeans, the cut may change a bit and the wash may change a little more but they are always consistently jeans. When Ray Brown decided to launch his menswear line, Ray Viscente Eclectic, he knew that it was time to bring something different to the table. With his use of different materials, patterns, and finding a way to turn a single piece into a collaboration of options, Ray has made a name for himself in the land on needle and thread.

SUAVV: When did you begin designing clothing?

Ray: Originally back in the 80s when I was designing womenswear. The menswear line did not come about until about 2008. I'd always wanted to do a menswear line but was not satisfied with the concepts. Once I was it was 'full steam ahead'! Ha!

SUAVV: Why design? Why was design different for you?

Ray: For me it was all about individualistic expression. I've always been a bit 'odd'! (even my Moms told me that! (laughing), lovingly of course!). Never quite fit any of the 'norms' that surrounded me. Designing allowed me to open up and express what I saw in my mind.

SUAVV: After figuring out that you were different with your fashion, how would you describe your style?

Ray: That one's easy. I am completely Eclectic! I love combining unrelated styles and concepts into something symbiotic; something that really 'works' together that you didn't know would until I 'linked' them. I also do like a 'standard' look. Even if I am wearing a classic 3 button single breasted suit I always have to add something to it to make it truly me!

SUAVV: That's on the money. I can tell that you love what you do. What does fashion and style mean to you personally?


Ray: The first word that comes to mind in 'individu-

alism'. The second is 'creativity'. When you combine those two together with the knowledge of what looks good on your physique and matches your personality you get a great union of fashion and style. This is true for designers too. I have trouble calling someone a designer whose clothing line is generic with no 'point of view'. I don't always have to like the point of view but for God's sake at least have one!

SUAVV: (Laughing) individuality is an important part of fashions originality. Lets take it a little extreme, if you could only design one article of clothing for the rest of your career, what would it be?

Ray: NOOOOOOOO! Lol! Wow, you are definitely handicapping me here! I think it would have to be a blazer. A well cut, well styled, well-fitting blazer can literally 'make your look'. And a blazer or 'blazer-look' can be styled in so many ways to accomplish so many different looks that even if you had nothing on but the right blazer you would still look good (just make it long enough to cover the unmentionables in this instance! (laughing))

SUAVV: (Laughing) yeah some drawls may be a good addition to that series LOL. As a designer, what are and have been some of your biggest obstacles?

Ray: MONEY! (laughing), or rather the lack there of at times! That aside I'd say changing the American idea of what men can wear. In the US, there is such a limit to what is deemed menswear. The time we 'dress' is in a suit and we tend not to think about looking good the rest of the time. What about all the other times when you want to look good but don't want to be in a suit! In other parts of the world, in particular Europe, you dress to show your individual style regardless of where you are or where you're going. Even with a pair of jeans you are going to have some amazing top on and complimenting accessories. You always want to look 'pulled' together without trying so hard. This is why I believe my clothing sells quicker to customers outside the states but I believe it will come together for the states as well. 















Ice Cold Fashion

Ice-T

Words: Michael Letterlough, Jr.

When you grab a mental picture of rapper turned actor Ice-T, the last image you probably get is of a fashion trendy icon, blazing red carpets and making public appearances in the latest eye catching faddisms. Over the years Ice-T has intentionally—or maybe even unintentionally—crafted his own personal style to correlate with the hard-core image he’s been associated with since the late 80’s and early 90s. But while many of his gangster rapping comrades have transcended their styles throughout the years, Ice-T has always maintained a little less-than-flashy persona.

Think what you will, but Ice-T’s seemingly simplistic fashion sense doesn’t stop him from over-indulging in what he likes. In fact, it’s not unusual to catch him sitting front row during Fashion Weeks for major designer shows, front row, shaded, and donned in his favorite color: black. So the question is, what does Mr. Tracy Morrow, better known to the world as Ice-T, like when it comes to fashion? He spoke to me about his discerning taste in clothes and designers while we sat together at a recent New York fashion show, where the only thing I was actually surprised by seeing was the absence of his shades.

What brings you to the numerous shows of fashion week?

It’s entertaining. I live in New York and I’ve been here for about 11 years and going to the clubs have become boring. It’s something to do, it’s good, and it gets a lot of people together. I just like the excitement and the energy of it. With New York, even though there is always action, you want to find something new to do. I look forward to Fashion Week. It’s fun.


Are there any fashion pieces that you obsess over? Hats, shoes, jackets, ya know? What’s that one piece that you have to have? I’ve noticed that you wear a lot of black.

I wear Black and white a lot. For me, all of my fashion is based off of a black pair of jeans, a white pair of jeans, and a snow white pair of sneakers. If I have those three pieces, I can bring any shirt together, any polo shirt or whatever. I like to keep my look clean, tight, and precise. A nice watch, not a lot of jewelry. I keep it really clean and classic. Then I have the other side of me which is the pimp side where I’ll throw on a yellow or pink suits and gators.

We have all seen the suit collections that you attend events to. How do you balance out when you are going to wear a suit and when you will be casual with your “classic” attire?

I try to dress appropriately. If I know everybody is going to be flamboyant, I’m going to out-do them. But if I’m doing a Law and Order event, I might put on a pin-stripped tailored suit. Day-in and day-out, you’ll find me in some black or white jeans. Plus I live in Miami as well so I wear a lot of white and polo shirts. You have to step it up a bit. I told my son that he’s not old enough to wear white jeans yet (laughing) you gotta know how to put it down. You gotta stay real crisp. You can’t be sagging them and all that bullshit.

Do you have a favorite designer that you tend to lean more towards? I know when it comes to suits men have a hard time finding a suit that fits right. What about your casual wear?

Honestly, I used to be an early Versace wearer until everybody got into it? I’m more of a Hugo Boss kind of dude at this point. I like the way the suits fit, it’s cut different than lines like Armani. I like nice clean straight lines. I go into Hugo Boss and I buy out their collection. They have the new polo shirts with a new look that they come out with during the World Cup. I bought all of that stuff. Being a man, if I like something, and I like how it fits, I just get it in every color. I buy all of the shirts down the line. I’m 6’ 210 pounds. So a lot of stuff is cut a little too tight for. So you have to find the jeans or pants that are cut the right way. I don’t sag my jeans but I don’t like for them to be too tight. 

27TH  2009



IF GOD

IS WILLING

AND DA CREEK

DON'T RISE



Raw and Uncut

Spike Lee

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos: David Lee



“We offered BP the opportunity to interview but they didn’t want to do it. But it’s not a big thing. I didn’t lose any sleep over it. They would have told us some more lies anyway.”

Shelton Jackson "Spike" Lee has been a trumpet blower for voice deprived communities from the day he swiped his credit card in 1985 to make his first feature film "She's Gotta Have It." From that moment, the Brooklyn, New York native has hammered his 40 Acres and a Mule stamp on social issues involving racism, race relations, poverty, drug abuse, corruption, stereotypes, violence, college life, media influence, and social injustices, just to name a few. With a long list of message based films, the most recent film "If God Is Willing And The Creek Don't Rise" may just be the documentary that will impact the most diverse crowd.

Spike started out focusing on the revival work and uplifted spirits of New Orleans, as well as the political corruption that took place within the last five years following Hurricane Katrina. After leaving New Orleans soon after the Saints secured the status of NFL Super Bowl Champions, a mechanical malfunction on the British Petroleum Oil (BP Oil)-leased, offshore drilling unit Deepwater Horizon in The Gulf of Mexico, exploded, killed 11 men, injured 17 men, burned for three days, sank, and began to erupt tens of thousands of barrels (or about 2 million gallons) of oil per day. Needless to say, Spike packed his bags and was on his way back to the "Who Dat" state for what some called "causing trouble."

"Nah Son," I don't react to that, 'causing trouble'...I didn't kill 11 people," Spike explains to me as we sat side by side at a conference table in the HBO Towers of Lower Manhattan. "I didn't bring about who knows what destruction to the wetlands of America; the fish and the fishermen who have been fishing and shrimping for many years. I'm not the one who did this. We offered BP the opportunity to interview but they didn't want to do it. But it's not a big thing. I didn't lose any sleep over it. They would have told us some more lies anyway."

Though speculations have kept the general public perplexed about the actual numbers and causes of the oil spill, Spike refuses to believe any of the information produced by BP as well as the United States Government. Christopher Haney, chief scientist for Defenders of Wildlife, called the government report's conclusions misleading. Haney said, "Terms

such as 'dispersed,' 'dissolved' and 'residual' do not mean gone. That's comparable to saying the sugar dissolved in my coffee is no longer there because I can't see it.

By Director Lubchenco's (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration administrator Jane Lubchenco) own acknowledgment, the oil which is out of sight is not benign. Whether buried under beaches or settling on the ocean floor, residues from the spill will remain toxic for decades." One of the biggest contradictions that have been placed in the scope of Spike is the supposed 75% percent of oil that government scientists claim the dispersant Corexit EC9500A and EC9527A has helped "disappear."

"That's a boldfaced lie," Spike exclaims. "This BP thing is the largest oil disaster in the history of the world. And this (oil) just disappeared. Are they saying 75% on the surface has been recovered? You know what we say in Brooklyn my tiny United States friends... 'Geeeeeeettttt the fuck outta here!' Who believes that? This is the world's greatest oil spill EVER. What did Andre 3000 say? 'Forever ever, forever ever.' They're still cleaning up the Exxon spill in Alaska from 20 years ago and now all of a sudden presto-chango, abracadabra into thin air. Here's another Brooklyn saying, 'Nah Son,' or if you go down south 'hell to the nah.' What you have to realize is that BP has been in the process, since April 20th, of buying up all of the experts in the sciences that deal with this. So (the experts) will be on their payroll and testify on their behalf when all of this is resolved in courts. In a lot of ways, how they are trying to get around that, a lot of these scientists work at universities and they will get the donations that can go to the endowment and the science departments of their school. Again, it's about money."

But the money trail doesn't stop at the Universities. It runs deep into our government. The oil and gas industries are the most profitable industries on this planet. The dispersants mentioned before are neither the least toxic, nor the most effective, according to the Environmental Protection Agency approved dispersants.



The health risks and environmental precautions are so high that the products used are banned from use on oil spills in the United Kingdom (home of British Petroleum). Ironically, 12 other products received better toxicity and effectiveness ratings. Knowing this, EPA Director Lisa Jag gathered enough information and approached BP with a formal letter expressing her concerns of the use of Corexit and its long term effect on the environment. To sum it up, BP wrote a letter back to the EPA stating that they were going to use it anyway.

“Basically, they said ‘Fuck you, we’re still using it,’” Spike says with a confused and shocked look on his face. “Something’s wrong. They should not be able to dictate to the United States government what the fuck we’re going to do. I’m perplexed why BP was allowed to run stuff. There’s a quote Ken Salazar is saying BP’s responsible and were going to keep our boot on their neck. Then you cut right to Obama saying ‘There’s no need for that type of language.’ I don’t know where everyone else is from, but I’m from Brooklyn. If you kill 11 people, a boot on the neck is mild. BP murdered 11 people. Whether you want to use manslaughter, negligence, the fact is that 11 families have been changed forever and if Ken Salazar saying we’re going to keep our boot on BP’s neck, that’s some light shit to me.”

As far as Spike is concerned, money is the root of all evil. A device that costs \$500,000 was skipped because they were behind schedule and the rig that was being leased from Transocean was already running the multi-oil giant a million dollars a day (even after raking in over \$246.1 billion of revenue in 2009). So the equivalent of a nickel to a person with \$246.10 is the value of those rig worker’s lives. Even though it may cost a dime a day until it is safe to operate, BP skipped the precaution. The same is true about the failed levy system built by US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) which turned Hurricane Katrina into one of the deadliest hurricanes in United States history.

The difference between life and death for the residents of New Orleans was a simple change in engineering and budget; constructing the more expensive and engineer mandated “T-Wall” instead of the cheaply and non-approved “I-Wall.” The result, a quarter-mile length of levy wall was breached and 85 percent of New Orleans became a bowl filled with water.

“You have two of the world’s biggest disasters because their (company’s) profits and the bottom line weighed more than people lives,” Spike says passionately. “That’s the message that ties the two films together. If this continues, where people get positions whether they are appointed or voted in and it comes about for them trying to get as much money in the process as they can, it’s going to be the demise of the country. If people get hurt, harmed, or die in the process, they’re like fuck it.”

Spike has been able to tap into the pain, defeat, and abandonment of the Katrina victims first hand. Walking into what he described as feeling like a “set of a Steven Spielberg end of the world film that he has yet to make,” and Spike took his truth telling cameras into the heart of the 9th ward. A series of stone steps leading to where the house filled with love used to be, now lead to empty lots filled with weeds. It’s a visual sign of the emptiness these communities now have, since 35% of its residents remain displaced in other cities, regions, or states after the mandatory evacuation.

Granted, a percentage of the 35% of people have no intention of coming back. They moved to Houston, to San Antonio, Atlanta, and they’re fine now, making a lot more money and their kids have a better education in better schools, and they may have a better home. Their standard of living is higher. Conversely, you have people that want to go home. But rent has quadrupled, there are no jobs, and above all else, a lot of the people lived in the projects that were knocked down, so they can’t go home.

“This was a gangster move,” Spike says as he sits on the edge of his chair. “It was on the drawing


boards. What are we going to do about the proliferation of poor black people living in these projects? But there's no way you can drag people out of their houses. When they came back their shit was locked up. Here's the thing you have to think about. There was legible damage. This is when they build stuff to last. Brick, mortar, you couldn't bomb that stuff. People came back after the mandatory evacuation, their shit was locked up and there was barbed wire fence and you couldn't get in. 2 years later, they knocked the muthafuckas down."

The Gulf of Mexico states, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama run neck in neck trying not to be the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to education, wealth, health, or any of the other categories that judge a state's prosperity. Yet, year after year, they are 48, 49, and 50. Therefore, to the general public, the residents are poor, ignorant, can't read or write, have no political power, and don't know what they are doing. Being a resident, those kinds of stereotypes will give you a complex. With all of that already in your psyche, you're hit with one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the country and within four years, followed up with the biggest oil spill in the history of the world. It draws a region to question their faith.

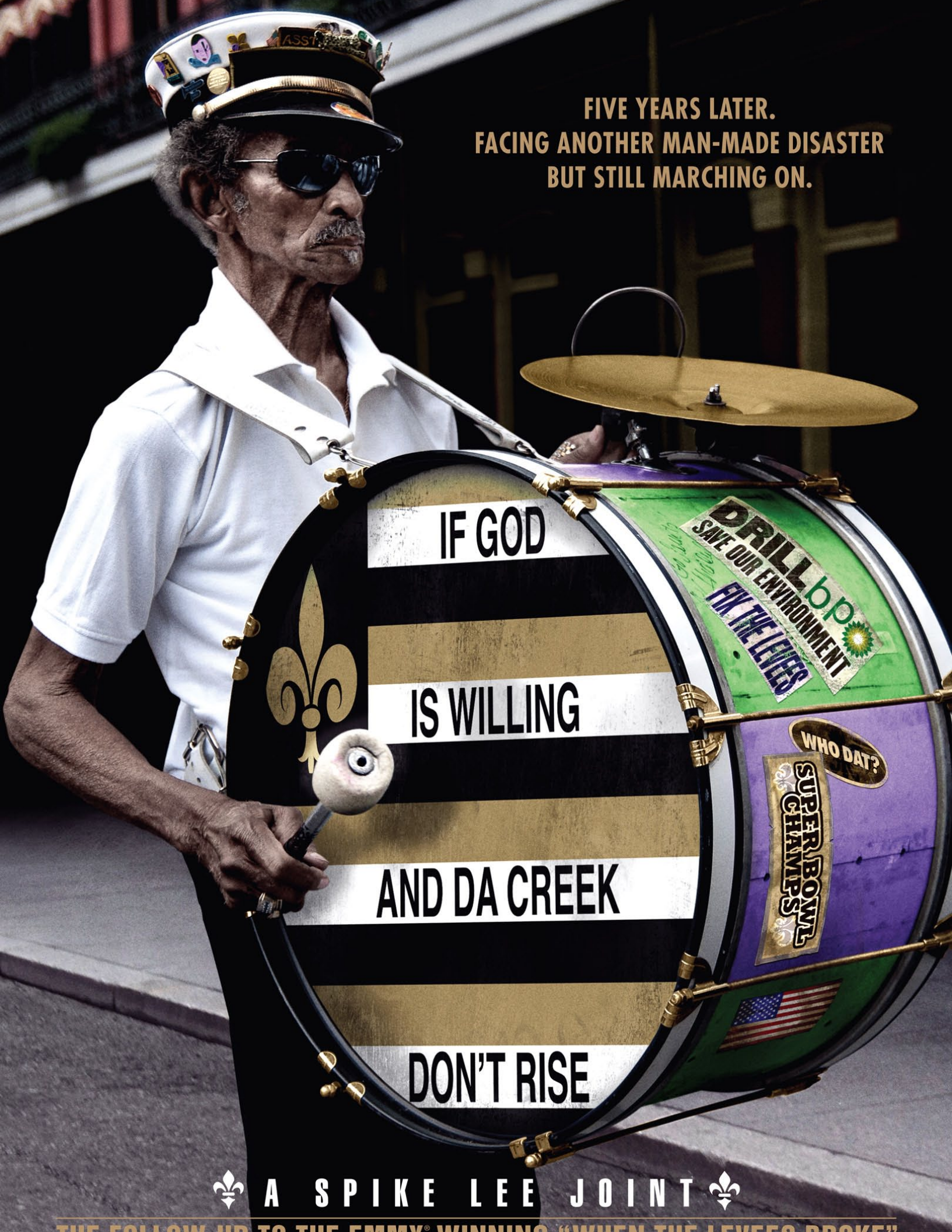
"Like people say in the film, "God damn, what do we do? God, what did we do to deserve this?" Spike recites. "I don't blame them for drinking. Except from the stuff that Brad Pitt is doing with the Make it Right Foundation and Common Ground Lower Nina, not that much has been done. The biggest hospital in the city, Charity Hospital, got closed. So the only way that you can get treated for mental illness is to get arrested and go to jail. So the suicide rate there has doubled the rest of the country. People are still dealing with this trauma. The children are the ones that really got hit. They're still dealing with this stress."

It's the end of our interview and I can't help but look at Spike with a puzzled stare. I have a million questions running through my head. For instance, why do we as Americans, knowing what we know about BP, still support and patron their gas and their oil

products? What are the effects of Corexit? Does this stuff eventually break down to being non-harmful? Where the hell is all of that oil that dropped below the surface and how are they going to get it, if they are going to get it? Why would the city of New Orleans tear down the biggest hospital in the city for no good reason, as well as destroy all of the projects? Why are the trailers from FEMA making the people living in them sick? One of the many things that Spike and I agree on is he is simply the messenger to deliver the information to the masses so that these very questions can be asked.

"I don't have the answers I'm just a film maker," he says with a smile. "You didn't get the memo? I didn't have the answer for racism in 'Do The Right Thing.' That was 1989. Critics said 'This movie is a failure. At the end of 'Do the Right Thing', Spike Lee didn't give us the solution for racism.' C'mon man. These are gangster moves. General Russel Honoré would not have allowed BP to dictate who goes where or who can fly where or dictate about Corexit. Like he said in the film, 'don't let it get confused with who's paying and who's running things.' We're all worried about how much oil is in the gulf. Nobody knows how much of that dispersant is put out there. We may find out 20 years from now, when we start having two-headed babies, that (Corexit) was more lethal and more damaging than the oil. And I'm not trying to be funny. It's never been used in this amount...EVER. This stuff gets into the food chain and has ramifications for who knows how long. Then we hit the hurricane season. So there's no telling where this stuff is at now. This can be catastrophic. But...the Saints won the Super Bowl!" Now WHO DAT. 

FIVE YEARS LATER.
FACING ANOTHER MAN-MADE DISASTER
BUT STILL MARCHING ON.



✦ A SPIKE LEE JOINT ✦

THE FOLLOW UP TO THE EMMY® WINNING "WHEN THE LEVEES BROKE"



Beyond The Joke

Kevin Hart

Words: Rashod Davenport | Photos: Michael Letterlough, Jr.

Kevin Hart didn't have the dream of one day becoming a great comedian. He didn't sit back and watch Comic videos and say "Hey, that's gonna be me one day." Actually, He had no ambition on being a comedian at all. On the contrary, he fell into comedy by "just being the asshole". While working as a shoe salesman in Philadelphia, Kevin was just himself, always laughing and making people laugh. It wasn't that he was telling his co-workers and customers jokes, he was just a quick witted, personable, and funny guy with great stories. So his coworkers convinced him to enter into an amateur contest at 'The Laff House' on South Street in Philadelphia, Pa. renowned for the comedy shows. Not only did he win 7 times in a row, he fell in love with the art and the comedic giant was awaken.

"I did well but I wasn't necessarily telling jokes I was entertaining," Kevin says. "I fell in love with the fact that I was able to make people laugh by going on stage and telling what I thought were jokes were at the time. After meeting some really good comedians who explained to me the style of comedy and what comedy is and the art of telling jokes, then it got to the point where I could be a little more serious and have a little more structure to what I was doing."

Regardless of how funny you think he may be, he not just on stage winging it. The structure that Kevin developed takes about seven months at a

time. Within that timeframe, he daily spends his "work hours" in his home office coming up with new material that was funnier than the last. After gathering everything, he takes it to the road for weeks to find out what works and what doesn't. With having one of his biggest fears being the fans finishing his jokes, Kevin, unlike some other comedians, tries to revamp his style to make it new and exciting. The procedure also keeps him out of the comedic beefs. All it takes is for one comedian to say that the dude on stage just used their joke.

"If you're talking about something that somebody else starts talking about, its either what you're talking about isn't as original as what you thought it I was or you need to start talking about something else," Kevin laughs. "I don't get into that. I don't get into the petty back and forth of I got this and you got that. If I'm talking about something and somebody tells me it's the same thing. I won't talk about it anymore. I take that energy and come up with something different."

Like all of us, there is one area that he knows will always be his own...his family. With Kevin there are no lines that he can't cross. Granted, he's not poking fun or making fun, HE is talking about HIS life, his experiences growing up with his family, and how his family affected him. You can't get mad when a person is telling the truth and make you laugh at

the truth. To Kevin, the things that happened weren't positive or negative. Yet, there was always something funny in it. It's just a matter of finding what that funny is and that's an area where he blossoms.

"They're bad situations that possibly at one point and time made me cry, but now looking back at those situations I laugh because I can find humor in it," Kevin explains. "My kids, my dad being on drugs, relationships wounds, making mistakes as a parent and not realizing that the mistakes were made until they were made, my mom passing away, which wasn't funny but, the actual funeral and the things that happened at the funeral, now looking back, was crazy. It was mayhem. I'm in a comfort zone where that I can talk about those things now because time heals all wounds. And now that those wounds are healed I'm able to find the funny. There are tons of things to talk about, it's just being smart enough to talk about them in a way that they're universal and people can relate to them and laugh at them without judging you at the same time."

Being a relatable guy is something that Kevin has always been. He takes pride in being the same person on and off of the stage. Loving to see people smile and keeping them happy has been an aspect of his personality his entire life. He always wanted the people around him joyful, even through the hard times before the money, when he was at his lowest, he was still the smile for someone else. It's what makes him continue to push. Well, that and his kids, or as he says, "my babies".

When it's not comedy, working, or occasionally whooping ass at a high stakes poker table, Kevin is focused on giving his five year-old daughter and three year-old son the life that he didn't have. You'll see Kevin on Twitter posting pictures of him and his son doing something crazy or even the new dollhouse that he built for his daughter which he jokes, if things goes south, he could probably live in. You can see the proud father moments and know that he is sincerely doing what a dad does...loving his children. He's making sure that he opens up doors that will be endless for them.

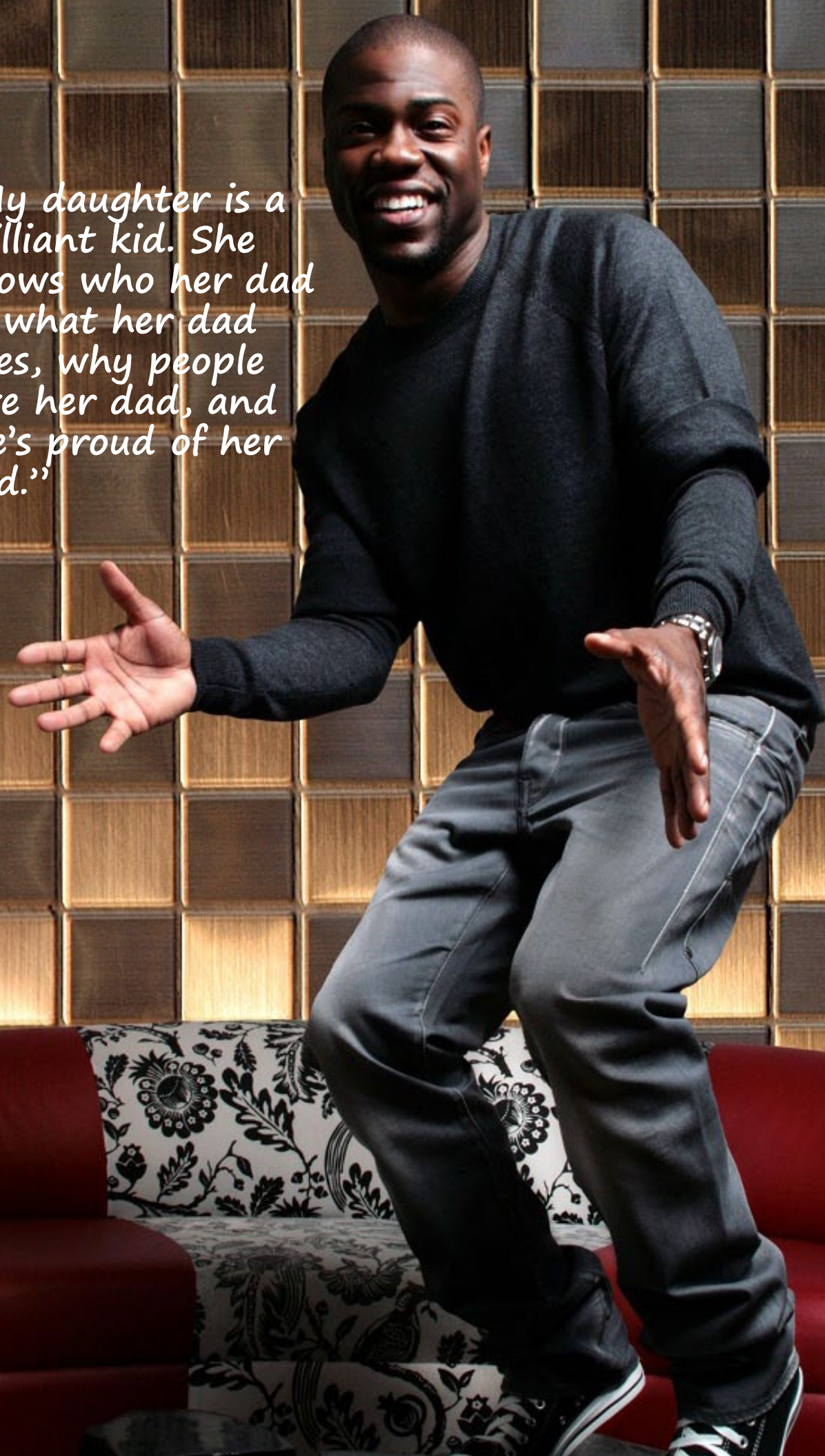
"I'm trying to take the last name Hart and make it a brand to a point that they'll be fine into adulthood to do whatever it is that they want to do and they shouldn't have a problem doing it," Kevin explains. "My daughter is a brilliant kid. She knows who her dad is, what her dad does, why people love her dad, and she's proud of her dad. She's smart. My baby has a great understanding but it's because of the way that I communicate with her on a regular basis. She understands that my job is to make people laugh and I travel all of the time and that I'm doing this to make a better life for her."

With his current success and ability to show that his name alone will sell, Kevin has come a long way since playing Nashawn in the 2004 movie "Soul Plane". Like a few other great comedians, Kevin has decided to push his creativity and love for entertainment into a production company where he will eventually produce, write, star and direct his own projects. The plan is for his company to gain the same success and notoriety as Adam Sandler's 'Happy Madison', Ice Cube's 'Cube Vision', and Eddie Murphy's 'Eddie Murphy Productions' who as of late, Kevin has been highly compared to being called "The Next Eddie Murphy".

In his modesty, Kevin tries not to think of the success and the contrasts. First, he doesn't want to become content with his current success instead of pursuing and pushing higher. With comedic greats such as Richard Pryor, Bill Cosby, Redd Fox, Dave Chappell, Steve Harvey, and Eddie Murphy achieving unbelievable success, Kevin notes that they were not only successful, they opened doors and broke barriers for comedians like himself. Secondly, while he is honored by the comment and always thanks the person making the comparison, he doesn't think it is possible to duplicate what Eddie has done.

"He's (Eddie) gone from the best comedian in the world to the one of the highest paid actors in the world to doing films just for his kids to thinking about touring again," Kevin says in a tone of amazement. "These guys are in conversations of their own. All of those guys (great comedians) are individually great

“My daughter is a brilliant kid. She knows who her dad is, what her dad does, why people love her dad, and she’s proud of her dad.”





“A lot of these best comics come from dark places. That’s where the comedy comes from. We all have been through some stuff so when you sit down and you hear the advice that’s given and the stories that they tell. You just sit back and listen.”





because of something. And the crazy thing for me is that now I KNOW those guys. I can talk to them. I have relationships with them. I've had conversations with them. I've been given advice by them. It's huge to me to be in their company."

Comedians serve an amazing purpose in the lives of everyday people. A joke, a funny story, or even a comedic movie allows us to let go of our lives for a moment and enjoy a heart-felt laugh. Through the pains and the hurt that we may have in our lives, for that second or for that hour, we are able to sit back, enjoy ourselves and bring that joy back that helps us push forward a little bit longer. For us, it's a quick fix to a long-term problem. Nonetheless, it's a fix. For the comedian, it's the same. While filming 'Death at A Funeral', Kevin was able to sit and talk with the comedic powers of Chris Rock, Martin Lawrence and Tracey Morgan during the quiet time. Even though we would like to be a fly on the wall

because it sounds like a hilarious place to be, everything isn't always funny.

"We have a good time but the conversations can get deep," Kevin says seriously. "A lot of these best comics come from dark places. That's where the comedy comes from. We all have been through some stuff so when you sit down and you hear the advice that's given and the stories that they tell. You just sit back and listen. They are sharing the experiences with you and they are shedding some type of light on what to expect, what to do, and what not to do because of the mistakes that they made and what mistakes they haven't made. I'm like a sponge I sit back and just soak it up. I couldn't say it to them but I grew up on them. I watched them on 'Def Comedy Jam', and their specials. I know that if I'm there, it's showing me that I'm doing something right." **S**

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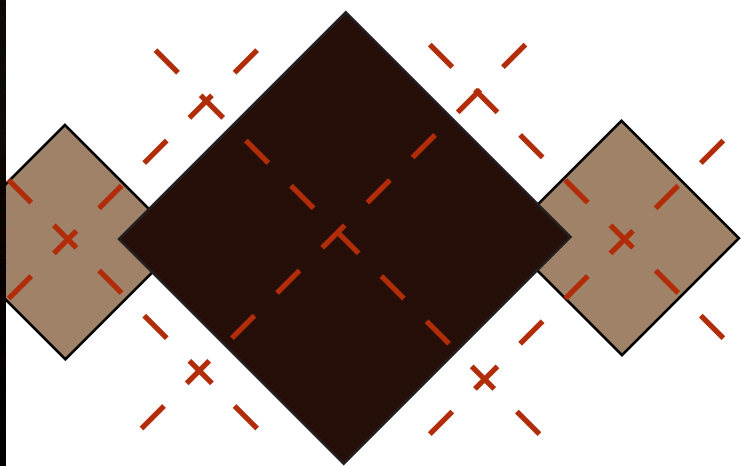
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Richful Thinking

**Russell
Simmons**

*Words: Rashod Davenport
Photos: Michael Letterlough, Jr.
Grooming: Jerris Madison*

“I’m not an angry vegan but I support angry vegans. I think it takes all kinds in the pursuit of happiness and freedom for any one group or for change.”

There are times in life that you feel empowered and encouraged. For me, it happened again the day that I entered a dimly lit top floor office with large argyle designs embedded in the walls. I found myself speaking to the man that transformed hip hop culture. As I sat in my chair across from the Russell Simmons, I received priceless jewels of knowledge freely. While having no problem using himself and his life as an example, he has become an open book over the last few years...literally.

With the success of his 2007 book ‘Do You’, he was approached by random people expressing how the book changed their life and how much they loved it. Therefore, Russell decided to give his offering of himself. He wanted to allow all of the teachings that he had received through his life and his continued search of knowledge so that they would be accessible to the masses. For him, it was a “cleansing of sort.”

“There’s a day that you’re realize the late night drunk isn’t as fun as the morning meditator,” Russell says with a look that screams to me to take in his advice. “It takes a minute to know that. You have to either be a late night drunk a lot, suffer hangers, or you can just be a person that knows better. Some things we know. We know not to put our hand in fire. But then some may want to go out and freebase... I did. You might want to smoke heroine... I did. Whatever. Somehow, even though we know it’s not good for us, we have this short term happiness that we think we get. Then we find out that the short term happiness has a long term burden.”

Although Russell feels that we are all on a journey regardless of what it is that we are doing with our lives, he knows that we are all spiritual people with a physical body. However, he realized that there are just some things that he has more faith in. Not only taking the words of your parents, the preacher and

the prophet, nor the scripture, because even when we know the truth, we are still willing to do what we know is wrong. This reasoning has led Russell to believe that true knowledge comes from learning to “walk in order by scraping your arms.”

“Struggle is your best teacher but you’re shouldn’t go looking for it,” Russell explains. “When it comes up you deal with it. You know what you’re doing when you’re going the wrong way. When you’re out of order you catch it. You don’t get it immediately. If you give off something that is hurtful, it comes back. You don’t immediately reap what you sow. As you start to have more faith, the actual good work makes you feel good. The inspiring, motivational, useful, service... service makes you feel good. As you learn that, you also find that results come. So if you’re a really hard worker and you’re very dedicated on the work and not the result, your work is better. Everything that you love so much will make you happy.”

That is the premise of the new book. Not that he is saying not to have toys like cars, televisions, and whatever else you desire. Respectfully, what he is explaining is that at some point, the toys just like a Christmas gift to a child aren’t as interesting. For that reason, he urges you to be a better and more diligent worker and well as a better giver. Being an amazing worker is a trait that Russell holds high. His book tells stories of persistence in the like of Kevin Lyles, Sean “Diddy” Combs, Lyor Cohen, Brett Ratner, and a young man named Wayne Bell, who met Russell at the Magic Clothing Convention in Las Vegas.

Russell was reminded of a quote by Rev, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. saying: “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep





“The first amendment before freedom of speech they talked about religion. That’s the most important thing this country was built on that. It’s a bad moment in America that we even have a public dialogue about it.”

streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.” This could be due to the fact that Russell had been previously reading a book written by King called ‘Why We Can’t Wait’.

The book mentioned a lot of things about non-violence and a notion of the Labor Unions joining the Civil Rights Movement, (one that Russell believes helped along his timely death). To Russell’s surprise, Martin made referenced to the Nation of Islam that Russell disagreed with. Though King didn’t say anything bad about the group, he stated that most people didn’t know who they were and he failed to acknowledge that they were also non-violent. While he did characterize them properly by stating that they didn’t believe living in equality was possible in that era, he was wrong about their popularity.

“Remember Elijah Muhammad said something much more inspiring,” Russell goes on to explain. “He said ‘All people are going to live together one day, just not right now. As far as I’m concerned, they’re the devil right now.’ They (the two movements) were different. They (Nation of Islam) made Martin Luther King Jr. more possible. We will all live together and love each other at some point. I have faith in that. I’m not an angry vegan but I support angry vegans. I think it takes all kinds in the pursuit of happiness and freedom for any one group or for change. I was disappointed that for such a hero, he felt so strongly about other groups (though they fought for the same types of freedoms) that he put his philosophy over theirs. We don’t really know which philosophy works the best. We just know that each persons has to do what’s inspires them. I still love the Black Muslims, I still love Farrakhan. They’re good in the community they save a lot of

lives.”

A deep critical standpoint of another person or a group will usually bounces off of them. It’s very hard to change someone if you don’t love them, or if they feel that you don’t sincerely care about them. When you do things and say things in a loving way, the tone in how you say things will allow your voice to penetrate the skin of adversity. There is no doubt you can change people by loving them. Still, someone has to remind them. Russell knows all too well how impactful showing a little love can change people from enemies to friends.

As the president of the Foundation of Ethnic Understanding, he took on the task of bringing 20 European imams and rabbis that were to visit America to take part in a twinning exercise. His goal was to take the top leaders of feuding religions groups and help them begin to build a bond that will result in peace. His outcome was not only amazing but life changing for the attendees. Nonetheless, when the city of New York began to attempt to shut down the building of Park51, originally named Cordoba House, (A 13-story Muslim community center to be located two blocks from the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan) Russell took a stand.

“I put the coexist images in my window and lit them up,” Russell says passionately. “I support the developer who’s in this office a number of times. I support the building of the mosque. I don’t feel there is any other way. They wouldn’t let black kids in the schools back in the 60’s, they just brought the national guard. They said fuck it were gonna bring the guard. They sat them in the seats and stood there with guns. They said ‘You’re not going to stop us.’ It’s the law. It’s the first amendment. That’s the



“I’m concerned about 10 billion suffering farm animals. It’s the worst thing that humanity is doing. It’s the greatest cause to global warming. Farming is the number 2 use of the oil behind the military.”

end of it. I'm very disappointed in our past governor, a Black governor. He wanted to buy them out to get rid of them. Get the fuck out of here why would you do that. He wouldn't have left so why does he want someone else to leave. I think it's really upsetting that he wanted to negotiate for them to leave. He's African American. Beyond that, why would anybody. The first amendment before freedom of speech they talked about religion. That's the most important thing this country was built on that. It's a bad moment in America that we even have a public dialogue about it.”

We have had grown so comfortable in our society that as long as it is not directly happening to us, it's not really effecting us. Sadly, it's a ploy that not only widens the gap of our consciousness but deepens the hole of degradation. When watching the news, there is no REAL news. We are told about events that have already passed or things that we have no control. A car accident on the expressway should never overshadow the genocide that continues to take place in Darfur, Haitians that are still sleeping in tent cities with no food, injustices within the communities that we live, or glaciers the size of cities falling into the ocean from global warming. However, When it came to cruelty and suffering, Russell dropped some knowledge that I never knew.

“15,000 Africans die every day from the lack of clean water,” Russell begins to break down. “Nobody mentions it. They talked about the missing girl from Brooklyn for 6 months. I'm concerned about 10 billion suffering farm animals. It's the worst thing that humanity is doing. It's the greatest cause to global warming. Farming is the number 2 use of the oil behind the military. So in reality, the cows are twice as powerful of all forms of transportation put together from the oil. It's expensive, the grain, the water. They use all of the water so that people can

eat food that makes them sick. There's an unconscious suffering. So much that human suffering is not prioritized while so much frivolous stuff is. We can live by it and they can dumb us down to do things that are unbelievable to us, to our communities, and to humanity.”

There are a lot of aspects in our culture that Russell Simmons can claim to have a huge part of. He is the Godfather of Hip Hop launching the careers of Kurtis Blow, Run DMC, LL Cool J, The Beastie Boys, Jay-Z, and a load of other rappers. The careers of numerous comedians launched on his platform of Def Comedy Jam. Poet's gained the moment to shine on Def Poetry Jam. He's funded programs, helped jumpstart minority businesses, and opened doors for many others. Nonetheless, it's the philosophical and social work that he aims to be remembered for.

“The idea of Yogic philosophy, which is the same as Christianity and Buddhism is more simple and hasn't twisted up the scripture to mean lets go to war and put people in the ovens, ethnic cleansing,” Russell explains passionately. “Religions have been used for this. The basics of religions is right there in the Yoga Sutras. That scripture is written before them all and it's simple to read. Maybe I can do that. Maybe I can get more people to practice yoga and meditate. I'm on the board of David Lynch Foundation because I want more people to meditate. I want people to look into themselves and say ‘Fuck no I'm not putting people in the oven. I'm not going to go along with this just because the leaders told me to do it, it's not right. Just because everybody else is doing to I don't have to do it.’ I want everyone to have that courage. If I can be part of changing that a little bit, it will be way more important than saying I founded Hip Hop.” **S**

Finishing Touch



I've taken a lot of time in the past year to sit and analyze how things have been when it comes to SUAVV and how to improve the outcome of the magazine as a whole. You know, sometimes it's very hard to give a real look at something that you love. For the past 5 years, Mike and I have poured all that we have had into a dream. Our goal has been to be happy, to feel accomplished, and ultimately to be successful. When I took a step away from the editors desk and into a subscribers chair, I found that the improvements that needed to be made were going to take time, energy, and sacrifice. At that moment, it became clear to me that my disadvantages were focusing on a single task at a time.

I've always managed to run 3-4 objectives at a time. However, I never realized that it took me a longer time to accomplish those things because I would never put my entire focus onto one task. I spoke to a friend of mine named Tracy Phillips who advised me to follow suit with a "Vision Board". She made her board the year prior and used the board to stay encouraged, focused, and as a checklist in life. As a quick explanation, a "Vision Board" is a board that you make (either digital or physical) with a collage of photos of things that you want, goals you would want to accomplish, and traits that you would like to improve of yourself.

You place the board in a place that you will see it preferably on a daily basis. Mine, hangs directly in front of my desk so that every time I sit down to start working, I see where I want to go. I took my board a step further, I decided to bring in a few friends to "call me out" when I am off track. Now, I will be honest, it's hard for me to allow someone to tell me that I am "F#!ing something up" But over the past year, I have learned to not only listen to it, but to accept it and try to make the changes needed. I can say today that I respect that group of friends even more.


I encourage everyone to make a "Vision Board". We all know things about our lives that we would like to have, places we would like to go, things we would like to achieve. The problem is we don't put it visually in front of us to keep it in the foregrounds of our minds. It may feel silly, but when you start realizing that you are checking things off of your list, the feeling is amazing. For Instance, one of my pictures was a mock cover of SUAVV that represented going to print...I can look at that photo now and smile knowing that it's another goal that I can check off.

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