

THE HYBRID

When music &
literature had sex in
the Stuy

Sponsored by a grant from
Pepsi/Hip Hop Summit
Action
Network Partnership



COMPOSED BY:

TEDDY BARNABAS
BREAKSMAN SHAKUR



Akin-Yemay

An innovative combination of literature and sound to
generate a spirit of persistence.

Publishing by:

Bed Stuy's Project Re-Generation, Inc. (PR-G)

679 Lafayette Avenue, 2nd Floor

Brooklyn, NY 11216

www.pr-g.org

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IMPORTANT note to you, our supporter:

Thank you for purchasing the Hybrid (assuming you purchased both products). This package contains a combination of literature and sound designed for an urban eye and ear. The compilation targets a mature audience that directly deals with inner-city communities. Teenagers, and their parents, music lovers, poets, entrepreneurs, teachers, nontraditional youth development and social workers will benefit best from this innovative blend.

To add authenticity to the characters and life to the music, ***expressive language*** commonly used in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, NY and similar inner-city communities has been *thoughtfully* inserted. The intention of the Hybrid is not to offend, but help create a spirit of persistence. It also seeks to provide quality and rhythmical Hip-Hop lyrics for an audience of music lovers and poets.

All funds generated by the Hybrid will be donated to Bed Stuy's Project Re-Generation, Inc. (PR-G). The resources will benefit PR-G's youth programs. To learn more about PR-G and or to join us as a volunteer, donor, participant, facilitator or staff member visit our website:

**“If our youth do not learn the way we teach, then
we must teach the way they learn.”**

-Maryvale Motto

www.pr-g.org

Or email us at:

communitystarts@pr-g.org

ABOUT PR-G

Vision

The elimination of teenage after school idleness in communities like Bed-Stuy through holistic programs

Mission Statement

Bed-Stuy's Project Re-Generation, Inc. (PR-G) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing New York's underserved young adults with educational programs, as well as work and volunteer experiences, while seeking to maintain a community where the residents of Bed-Stuy can be proud to reside.

Upcoming Books

Bengi

Detective King

"When I read the writing of Barnabas Shakur what I hear above all else is a genuine desire to evolve and develop into the best person he can be, taking upon himself, and sharing with others, the honest and forthright self-assessment that such a bold inner journey requires. I also witness, on every page, and in our every conversation, a real passion to make a difference. Barnabas Shakur is the real thing, a social entrepreneur for our times, and part of the solution in, of and for the Bed Stuy community. I support his movement, and I support him. Onward, with HOPE."

John Bryant – President Founder, Operation Hope

"Endowed with a true entrepreneurial spirit, Teddy and Barnabas have given a roadmap for any young person who feels a loss of hope but has the will to make a change in both themselves and the community around them. The struggles of the individuals in this book point a lens on the many difficulties facing youth today, yet is proof positive that we can and must save ourselves."

Robin Graham, MA – Mental Health Counselor

"Barnabas is one of the top young social entrepreneurs in America. His work with PR-G is crucial to the development of Bed Stuy. I am proud he is a friend and I support his every step."

Steve Marriotti – President Founder, National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)

"I think they've created a whole new genre, an exciting and inspiring read. The hybrid is an intimate slice of inner-city life."

Ms. Baratta – Teacher, William E. Grady HS

"Akin-Yemay is a compelling story about community building through the eyes of the youth of Bed-Stuy. If we want to support and help sustain our youth, we should all read and listen to the Hybrid."

Kevin Ryan – Program Officer, New York Foundation

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Klassikal Musik

Visit <http://www.pr-g.org/sampleklassikalmusik.htm> to hear the following tracks.

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***Finally, we give praise and thanks to the higher force which created all that was,
is, and shall be.***

Introduction

“How can I spend my life with hopes of restoring order to communities where family structures are destroyed, when my family structure is fragile as glass?”

“How can I expect to provide for others, when it seems that I am not providing for myself?”

“What greatness is it that others see in me? Why can't I see it?”

“My weaknesses seem to overpower my strengths, control, understanding, wisdom, and faith.”

“Have I wasted three years of my life? PR-G has the potential to provide a better life and living for others and myself, but it doesn't seem to provide what I need now.”

“Lately I've been feeling unstable...maybe I was always unstable and have become good at hiding it.”

“I love my wife and son, what would become of me if they were no more?”

“When do I, as a man, recognize when it's time to give up? When should I persist forward?”

“Do I give into what I believe I should not?”

“Must I be completely destroyed in order to be rebuilt strong? I feel as if the decisions I make are destroying me.”

“I don't want to do anything...just sleep...not shower, not eat, not speak, or be seen for I am ashamed of my actions.”

“Am I a leader for today's youth, do I benefit or hurt the hood's Akin-Yemays?”

“TeddyP, the coauthor of this book, my dear friend, and brother left his only means of income to work with PR-G. His life experiences, personal circumstances, and desire to see PR-G's mission fulfilled keeps him here. He came to work everyday during the past for over a year with no financial gain—just lunch and a metro card...he leaves every night happy that he came...he continues to work through PR-G...believing in me and our mission. Should he? He has bills to pay.”

“I lost control of myself and committed an action that I regret. My loss of control drove me into a state of depression. This state of depression inspired me to write this snapshot about my life. I am called a young leader, thinker, a visionary, but I had no foresight that night, no great wisdom came to me. Nothing that I learned in martial arts, on the streets, in school, or in the business world gave me the ability to control myself. I was possessed by rage.”

The Ripple Effect – Track 6

B- *The preacher said life's a blessing I'm living a curse/First to, visit the hearse then to dwell in the dirt/Trying to, live in this verse like a worm in the dirt/ And it's wet outside Ain't gonna die outside/From birth I swore to live and die by the sword/Benighted by my lord to take the Stuy by force/My smiles are false truth is, I ain't happy/Sb*t ain't sweet/Yeah...Keep staring at me!/Nervous, lips chapped, throat dry/About peace Don't make me choke this guy/Don't make me hurt this guy cause lord I swear/Cause lord I swear/Would Jesus take me?/Muhammad save me/Jab don't hate me/ Streets abused me lately/World confuse me/Everyone's right, who's wrong, ain't me?/Been in the storm for too long safely/My faith is gone with the wind/Been through fire and storm/Stuck! Like a fly in a web/The struggles making it worse/ the only way to express is to write and then erase the verse/ Could somebody save me?/Chris Slaughter! "Can you hear my cries?"/K-Swift!/NROOOO.../NROOOO.../We need this New Rap Order.*

Is life worth living? Should I cut my wrist?/What the F%# I'm thinking?/Feel like Mr. Froto's guide/ Close my eyes to find both good and evil inside/They collide like woman with child/there's something inside/It's love & hate/To give him life or death or cut his face/I got the whole world in my hands/Frost bit/Cold world, in my hands/Right hand man 4.4 in his pants/Don't cross me/I'm like that black cat/That street pole make you back, back like Jesus when He rose/All you hear is blat! Blat! Ain't no he rose/seen the black gat and he froze/It's a coold world wipe the snat from your nose! TeddyP what you bang against bro?

B & TP - *Bang against poverty/Bang against crime/Bang against the man who dropping them dimes/Bang against deadbeat pops, deadbeat cops/Won't stop until the forces against us get smoked like rocks/Bang against fake hip hop cats misleading our people/Guns, drugs, jewels, and prisons/Is that all you got for the people?/A warrior's nightmare, is a mind not clear/The forces, The Difference...is your new nightmare.*

I. BEGINNING

Nearly three years ago, I set out on a pilgrimage, without a road map to find my destiny. In that journey I left my only means of financial stability, my friends, and in essence my family. Physically I was present, but in mind and spirit I vanished. In my journey I searched for personal development, financial freedom, and social change; today my journey continues. As a boy I suffered from the same pains of poverty which gripped my community. My two siblings and I were raised in a single parent household. Throughout my childhood and teenage years my family's income fluctuated between \$10,000 and \$19,000. Our financial requirements, however, were steady; approximately \$7,000 was our yearly rent, \$2,500 was for bills, and \$2,500 towards food. I have no idea how my mother pulled it off with clothes, school trips, medical fees, leisure and a host of other living expenses.

When I became a man, I decided to change my particular circumstances by choosing the path of entrepreneurship, a road which I believed would lead to my financial security. I stopped complying with the system of poverty I was in, a system with people in power who lead me to believe that success was only achieved through college and a traditional job. I didn't believe in that system and chose to find another path to success.

I wasn't born in America. Yup, I am an immigrant. It doesn't matter that I went to P.S 137, I.S 275, W.E. Grady, and NY Tech., or that I speak perfect Brooklyn English. I am still an immigrant, one who was "illegal" until 2002.

My mother came to America seeking a better life for her family. However she lacked sufficient knowledge and resources to acquire the "American Dream." Mom came to the US seeking opportunities and found herself in an awkward dilemma. She couldn't work "on the books" and was forced to acquire low paying jobs "off the books." Governmental assistance such as welfare and housing was unavailable to my family. My brother and I could go to college if we so chose, but financial aid is not an option to non permanent residents. Many other immigrants secretly deal with these same issues. Life as an undocumented immigrant has always been challenging, but times became worse after September 11th, now undocumented immigrants can no longer have some of the simple benefits I had such as a driver's license, state identification card, or a bank account.

My wife Simone and I went to high school together; we were good friends. It wasn't until we graduated that she decided to reciprocate the romantic feelings I openly revealed. She finally gave me a chance after she broke up with her high school sweetheart. Due to our five year prior friendship our relationship quickly became serious.

Within three months we were living together. Everything was “peaches and cream” until the United States Immigration and Naturalization Services sent me a letter stating I had 30 days to leave the country. Yeah, I used to talk enough Sh*t about this good old U.S. of A., but when the time came for me to leave against my will, I would have sold my right arm to stay. I told Simone the situation and we both knew the only way we could stay together was to get married. So six months into our relationship at the age of 21, I proposed...that same week we eloped.

II. TRANSITION

I was seven when I arrived at JFK Airport in the winter of 1987; fresh from the Caribbean in sandals, shorts, and a tee-shirt. I was happy to be in the U.S. The previous six months my brother and I lived in Grenada with my great aunt. This lady hated me; the only reason she kept us was because of the measly 75 American dollars my mother sent her a week. She wrote letters to my mother referring to me as a “savage.” While her family and my brother ate in the house, a table was set for me outside on the porch next to the dog. But that part of my life was over; I was now in “the land of the free.” It didn’t take long for me to step into the American reality. It was cold, everyone seemed to be mean, buildings scraped the skies, at midnight the city was lit as if it was noon, and Americans spoke with a strange accent. They said “forehead” instead of “forrid,” “three” instead of “tree,” “film” instead of “flim,” and “beating” instead of “lix.”

When the 90s arrived I finally adjusted to American society. It wasn’t hard; the main rule was “Don’t take no Sh*t from nobody.” During the 90s Bed-Stuy was crazy. According to NYPD statistics at the 81st precinct, 8,000 crimes were reported in 1994 alone. This was only one of the three precincts in Bed-Stuy. Bed-Stuy was continuously ranked as one of the worst neighborhoods in New York; worst, and most residents didn’t even report crimes. They either dealt with them or accepted them as a part of the community’s culture. Crimes included robberies, murders, larcenies, rapes, assaults, and burglaries.

As a teenager, for no cost, I regularly saw what moviegoers today pay Hollywood big money to see. By the time I was 15 I saw police helicopters flying close to the ground chasing suspects, gun fights with rival groups, cops and robbers action in broad daylight, arson, family vendettas; you name it, I saw it. Only two guys I knew closely from my childhood are not dead, in prison, or committed to the streets. When I was seventeen one of my most traumatizing life experiences occurred - my cousin was murdered.

Maudlyn was 27 and ultra beautiful—a dime amongst dimes. She was pretty quiet and kept to herself for the most part. Never was she involved in the block politics until her death. She lived with her mother in one of the six-family apartments in my three-story building. One day in April of 1997 she didn’t come home; that shook her mother’s bones. Regardless of age, it was unlike her daughter not to at least call. Days passed, and not a word from Maudlyn. My family was in a desperate panic. Missing person fliers went up all over Bed-Stuy. Unless you ever had a person close to you missing for weeks, you cannot understand the feeling of lost hope that comes with it. Every time the

phone rang we prayed it was her, but it never was. Her mother, a strong Christian, used to say with confidence that, "she'll be back," but as days rapidly passed we began to anticipate the worst...and it was the worst.

A heat spell struck and the temperature began to rapidly rise about six weeks after Maudlyn's disappearance. Summer was blooming and an awful stench began to permeate throughout the hallway of our building. My mother couldn't take it. She knew what death smelled like, but couldn't identify what had died. One early afternoon after my mother could not take the smell any longer, she called the police. By late evening the coroner was exiting our building past a crowd of about 200 onlookers with Maudlyn's decomposed body. She was found hidden in a crawl space between the roof of the building and the third floor ceiling. Pain tore my spirit slowly from my body that evening. I wanted revenge but I was powerless. The murderer was her sister's boyfriend. He helped us frantically search for her day and night for weeks and kept his silence. The night of her discovery the police took damn near all of my family in for questioning. We were all suspects. Everyone came home, but the murderer who confessed. A reason for the crime was never given. Of my beloved Maudlyn the final memory I have is the overwhelming stench of her rotting carcass. After life deals you a blow like that what else can you do but "Keep it Rolling"?

III. CHANGE IS NEEDED

Weak family structures, an inequitable education system, lack of community and seemingly little means of providing a decent income forced many residents of my neighborhood to commit crimes. Every day violent deaths and prison were taking brothers and sisters from the block as if community leaders, drug dealers, and gangs were selling them to the captains of slave ships. Our blocks looked as if a garbage truck came through it releasing all of its contents. Mothers of the area were constantly stressed, usually providing for a family of fatherless children. Neighborhood schools were more like social resorts for convicts in training. The majority of teachers were incapable of efficiently handling “challenged” children. Males minding their own business were harassed by police officers. Drugs were blatantly sold on street block corners. Fighting, arguing, and being able to convincingly threaten the life of another person seemed to be prerequisite skills to survive in Bed-Stuy. All types of predators, prey, and scavengers resided in this concrete jungle I called home.

Who's the Black Uncle Sam – Track 2

B—*It's time to put together these lonely words/Bloods and Crips unite!/These pigs got you fighting like you only herbs/Formulate a pack – put the next generation on lock - like Star Trek - far fetched it is not!/F%# superman - my thugs is real - their hearts is steal – faster than a speeding squad car/Gangsta like Malcolm, ASSata, and Pac/Buss shots - stab and steal - F%# cops - /K-swift knows “that's the deal.”/You aint packing lunch boxes – you packing the steel/A pervert your not, but you're jacking their meal/Victims of the circumstance it's a fact it is real/Engulfed in poverty - only know crime - everything else - we lacking in skill/Public school taught us how to be wolves, join packs - have - weed and crack for the sale/Older brothers from the block prepared us for jail/What you don't know kills – black Neo choose right – when you choose your pill.*

TP—*Reasons for the Hybrid, the Difference, PR-G/Love we got for the hood/Some say it will take us 6-6 feet deep/Out of the gutters our death going creep/Like 6 alligators stalking a piece of meat/But can a man have a better death? We warriors Bus TedP don't want to die in our sleep/Let me send this message out to my enemies/In the depths of my grave 666 a ya'll squeezing in with me's/When it be the season for war we Bare Arms like 6 months in a woman's fetus/Rougher than the neck of 6 slave who played dead on a noose came back to the plantation killed master and freed us/The pains of the world we felt we call them learning experiences - nothing else/My hunger longer than the distance between where I stand and Philadelf/Still to God, to no man the floor felt my knees begging for help/We was born with gold mines in our mind - flooded with wealth/Dig and you'll find signs that a lead you to Bill Gates money bin/We could only move foreword as if oonur backs got out growing fish fins/The African god of victory put together my legs so when they embrace the battle field we could do nothing else but win/Shout out to the pigs/Bdeat/Lick your mother skont dead/PR-G the black uncle Sam/We need you young blood, I know you bled/Loss a couple a your kin to the fire now a days only aiming for heads/The party don't stop cause the cops on the block and the rock in the sock, bullets in the lead/Beef in the air trigger pon cock a pig bound to get shot cause I aint down to get locked, all I want is to be fed/I aint trying to get popped I aint trying to see Biggie or Pac and if the hands on my clock stop, I'm bringing F%#ers with me to my eternal bed/When I'm gone soldier carry on can't ever stop the war drum from being beaten with the bones out of my enemy legs/Anger fill every corner of my mind got fire leaking out of my eyes, my tears colder than the ice road of the Jamaican Bob sled/Blood I'm seeing M-16 for 4 years its been my second woman in bed*

B—*Barnabas got his experience from Battle Scars of the block/Got his PHD from Bed-Stuy U - where I seen hungering days/Children of Judah stop playing school at a very young age and start selling crack on the pave/This is where beef gotta be/Everyone live of everyone interdependently/But we at the bottom you see/That's one place nobody wanna be!/Where you gotta scrape Sh*t up of the floor to eat/Eat Sh*t from a idiot boss giving you \$250.00 a week/You gotta slave - be a good boy behave/Bills barley being paid/Its all in a plan/To place that crack up in K-Reem's hands/Making money off his black back being broken in the can/Its funny, the lawyers, judges, and cops is all mixed up in this sour tang/They couldn't survive alone/Black men disappearing from the streets as if the gbetto is having its own Tsunami Storm/Why is Mickey momma home crying her son is gone and/Its early in the morning and/She's mourning its been 40 mornings/But for a moment it seemed like it was only yesterday he was calling.*

As an adult looking back I now realize that my past was filled with many troubles, but when I was a teenager experiencing life, it was nothing but normal. I recall an instance when I sat with some friends on my building stoop and witnessed an old man being robbed by a young adult in front of a church about 100 feet away from us. It was about

2:00 p.m. on a summer day. We casually watched this bold robbery take place. Afterwards we spoke excitedly about the robber's audacity. "I mean he had some nerve...couldn't he at least wait until the man passed the church?" In a "normal" society the police would have been called and witnesses would have filed reports...but not in the Stuy...you mind your damn business! There were rules to heed. If the cops caught you for breaking the law, you face a judge and jury...if you broke the Stuy's understood laws you could very well wake up with a gun in your mouth and go to sleep with a slug in your head. As a teenager this was all normal and common. It was all I knew.

In my mid-teens, life threw me a curveball. Mom drove me to a place I thought no mother should ever bring her child...a precinct! Man, I was Sh*tting bricks when we pulled up. "Why in the world would she bring me here?" I thought to myself. I used to do some grimy Sh*t. I hope she didn't think I was turning myself in! We walked into the precinct toward the officer at the front desk. As soon as I entered the precinct it felt as if someone had grabbed a hold of my nuts at the door. I did not want to go any further. She asked for "Detective King." Maaaaan, it must have been the hands of God that kept me standing by her side.

King came down the stairs; he was stocky with a dark complexion...a mean looking brother, 6'3" 220 solid pounds with a smooth Barry White voice. When he reached out his huge hands towards mine, I noticed fierce knuckles that seemed to have dished out quite a few beat downs. He told Mom to wait in the car—he would call her if there were any problems. When my mother left, King asked, "Son do you know why your mother brought you here?"

"Yeah, cause she crazy!" I replied upset, confused, and scared. I was ready set on denying any allegations made about me or any of my friends. King smiled and said in his deep voice "Nah son, she wants you to join my youth program, the Law Enforcement Explorers." Shiii*t...can you say relieved? I didn't want to join no stupid youth program, but I was real receptive...Sh*t, I thought I was going to jail.

King told me a few things about the program, and then brought me downstairs to introduce me to some of the participants. He changed my life. This "pig" was not a pig after all. He was human, and beyond that he was hood! This brother was so hood I didn't believe he was a cop...I mean he couldn't be. Cops acted like pricks, but he behaved as if he lived on my block. He took us to neighborhoods all over New York, showed us positive people, and how to do positive things. He made us proud and happy to go to a precinct everyday...plus, he had some fine sisters enrolled.

King influenced me to join other programs and take advantage of beneficial opportunities. He was the first male figure in my life outside of my brother that acted as an older brother. His character was caring, humorous, and, did I mention, hood? King let us ride around in police vehicles doing what we pleased. He would defend anyone of us with his pistol if he had to. He used to be a boxer, and proficiently spoke the language of the ghetto. That is what made me love and respect him. During the summer of 1997 he took the program participants to Virginia Beach for a week. One day we were on the beach and I kept taunting him, lightly slapping his face in a playful fighting stance and running before he could catch me. We were not in the ghetto, but the ghetto was in us. The many white people around us didn't seem used to our wild behavior. King kept warning me "boy quit it, hardhead make soft ass." I caught him one time a bit harder than I planned, and with the speed of a cheetah he returned the favor...*SMACK!* He slapped the Sh*t out of me! I mean the seagulls flew away. The other Explorers found it to be the funniest sight they ever saw, breaking out into a roar of laughter that I couldn't help but join. The strangers that witnessed the smacking were quickly shuffling away from us. The echoing sound that let off when King's hand connected with my face would have made anyone move. And just like that it was over. We all went back to having fun. Onlookers may have looked at King as an aggressive or crazy man, but not us. We thought quite the opposite.

IV. Barnabas and Late

King and directors from the other youth programs I joined encouraged me to hone my poetry writing skills. When I was 19 I was part of Project SAFE, an affiliate of an organization called Project Reach Youth. At that time, a mentor named Mara was the Director of the program. She always heard me recite my poetry to the other students. One day she called me and insisted that I compete at a spoken word competition hosted by Youth Speaks (YS) called a slam. Eagerly, I went to compete. I arrived 15 minutes before the competition was over... late huh? That didn't stop me from finding Jen Weiss in a crowd of about 500 people. She was the Executive Director of YS, a white lady, slender, timid-looking, and quiet.

"Excuse me, are you Jen Weiss?" I said as I approached her.

"Yes, can I help you?"

"I wanna perform!" I was quite confident with my statement. There was only 15 minutes left in the show and all the poets were already chosen. "I won't disappoint you!" I said with excitement.

"I'll see what I can do. Where are you sitting?" I showed her a place where she could meet me. Five minutes later she returned and told me that I would go on last. The audience and judges had been listening to a lot of poetry, and were ready to go by the time I got on. When they called my name I went up to the stage and performed my three minute poem, BAN (B*tch *SS N!\$%*).

"I know I'm supposed to forgive/ But I won't forgive this!/ That faggot bounced—he split gave mama the business..."

This was a poem I wrote about my absent father. At the end of my two minute poem, the audience burst into applause. I won second place, losing 1st place by one point.

After the competition I received so many compliments, I instantly became known as Barnabas the Poet. I joined Youth Speaks and quickly became one of its strongest youth representatives. Through Youth Speaks I was able to speak about poetry at many high schools in New York. I was featured in numerous magazines, including MH-18, a division of *Men's Health Magazine*. I was even featured as a youth spoken word artist at a performance in Russell Simmons' home in the Hamptons. These experiences opened my eyes to a new society. I began to realize that the life I grew up in was not necessarily the life I would die in.

As I traveled to other states performing, I saw cleanliness, happiness, and community. When I returned home to Bed-Stuy, I began to notice the garbage, violence, and unhappiness that I hadn't recognized before. My first thought was to get money and

leave. But, I couldn't. I loved my hood. How could I depart while the people were sleeping? I had to wake them, but how?

Two years after my first performance I still lived the "street life" with my friends, performed spoken word, and attended youth programs. My closest friend was this kid named Late. We became brothers in the 7th grade. This cat was a product of our environment. Late was short and slim with more heart than a hungry lion. I remember him almost getting us kicked out of junior high in the 8th grade.

There was a kid named Keston that we disliked for no good reason. We used to taunt him. One day after gym class Keston told the gym teacher that Late threatened him with a knife in the locker room and took his book bag. I had already left the gym and went to my next period computer class. Unaware of what had recently taken place Late came to class as if nothing happened. While other students were coming into class and getting settled in, we were playing games on the computer. Keston came into the class while the teacher was in the hallway. When Late saw Keston he transformed into a hunter right before my eyes. Like a predator he focused on his prey ignoring the surrounding environment. Late slowly rose to his feet, and quietly walked toward Keston. When he reached him, with the speed and force of lightning his right hand swung across the air and a solid balled fist connected with Keston's jaw. It was only one hit...*CRACK!* I have yet to see someone fall to the floor and go to sleep after one hit like Keston did. Afterwards Late returned to the seat next to me as if nothing happened; we continued to play games on the computer. Yo, I know this isn't funny, but you had to be there when the dean came and poured water on Keston's face gently slapping his cheek for him to wake up. When he opened his eyes the dean asked him what had happened. He said, "I...I...I don't know." Neither did anyone else in the class who knew what happened.

Late knew Keston would eventually snitch so he gave me his four inch golden handled dagger that he brought to school with him that day. One period later the Dean and school guards came and got Late out of class. During the following period the guards came to get me. I knew they would have come sooner or later, so I had stashed the dagger in a desk. It was found, and we were both suspended. Maaan, guilty by association is a crazy term.

Every experience we shared was fun-filled. Some you could have laughed at only after a narrow escape and others in the moment. I remember in the 9th grade we went out with Simone and her friend. Late wore sleeveless bubble that was hot pink. I had jokes but he was feeling too sharp to hear me. Simone's friend was sexy as hell so Late

was doing everything he could to be suave. On our way to Kings Plaza Mall we all got into a dollar van. Late got in and something slightly ripped his bubble. As he sat feathers slowly began to rise all over the van. Some feathers even went into Simone's friend's mouth...man...when I found out Late sprung a leak it was jokes for the rest of the night. And they were all on his behalf. I laughed during the moment...he laughed after the fact.

We spent a lot of after school time together between 1993 and 1998. Then he started hanging with some brothers I didn't spiritually align with. From 1999 to early 2001 we began to spend less time with each other. Gravitating towards the streets having nothing better to do with his idle time, he joined the Bloods, one of the most prominent street gangs in communities with fragile family structures. In 2001 his mother called me and told me he had been arrested for murder. Shortly after having a rushed case, Late was sentenced to serve a life sentence at a maximum security prison. At the age of 20 he was looking at 25 years in prison. His family didn't have enough money, and legal aide didn't care to beat the case. He pleaded innocent, but innocence is expensive, and unfortunately he got what he paid for.

Victim of the System—Track 5

*B—We spit lyrics say Sh*t that got kids catching seizures and fits near us/Our mind and soul will not be defined by this era/Blind dummies can't hear what we're saying/Can we spit clearer?/In a sense we're distracted taking pictures of us/Innocence never mattered when the pigs were coming/Innocence never mattered when the dick was cumming/Innocence doesn't matter if you guilty youngin/We moan and like an orgasm, tears are cumming/21 years of life/What did you we gather from it?/don't F%# up youngin they would stab ya stomach spill your food make you Gag and vomit/Spit like this! Get respect like badges on us/1-800 you-thug they would call your number/If you don't pick up – they'll pull you under/Our boy got 25-life his nigs made deals with the pigs/No balls B*tches - I wonder if they stand when they piss/Or pull down their panties and assume the po-si-shhh/I send him letters every year he aint responding/I wanna visit but I aint taking a trip for nothing/ he's my dog and I love him/Wherever we went we was cousins/Heart a steal/will fight anyone - pit bull's will/One day a group of bloods took his bag/He went home - grabbed a kitchen knife steaming mad/Warrior's spirit someone's getting stabbed/Walked down the block with his knife in hand/They seen him coming Sh*t sunthin aint right with this man/His mom seen him leave - ran behind her son/Like Craig's pops she pleading with him – "Please put the knife down son"/He put it down and swung/Hooked off on the closest cat – gave him an instant lump/Not giving a F%# he was ready to die/Cause tomorrow - they aint punking his pride/This is the code of Bed-Stuy, Do or die!/And my brother Late he's still alive.*

TP—22 years of life, what did I gather from it?/Battle scars, but I survived/It would have been 2 gallon of tears if I collected my cries/I would have been a better man if at 7, "Grandfather Preaksman" didn't die/He left his name for me under the bottom of the sky/I burned the bottle of liquor that caused his liver to fry/But a death is only a crime if you didn't pay taxes to the Government slime/It's a reminder to the vic around every corner the world hold a surprise/That could bring joy or have you cry/South Side of Georgetown, Morvant, and Bed-Stuy/That's 3 slums, you can't breath son/The pollution in the air depress the bumming bird to the point where she don't want to hum/Like Ray Charles I wanted to hear the song she sung/These words are despair mixed with a little rum/Drink it through your ears, till you stumbling, fumbling but not dropping the bottle drunk/I float when I sleep on an imaginary top bunk/Cause life's a ball court my spirit's a young Jordan, he want to dunk/But my physical weaknesses hang me 2 inches above sunk/Into the prison system many of us are dumped/I've come to know Late through the eyes of Bus from a time when they was submerged in the smoke of ganja the pusher pump/Floating in the stinkiest part of the slums, that reek like the smell of a punk/He wasn't big, but had a ship load of spunk/This is the realness, ain't no front/Throw you off the hands of time if you try pulling a stunt/Actions most of the time ain't justified however it's the way of the world we're from/Our click is china town, no ass you will find among us/Ain't no part of the world you'll find it cool to be "BUTT"/7 principles and my Ronin, they all must a go up/The ladder of success and stay out the hands of a coppers cuffs/Cause as far as I'm concerned, the mark on the beast is a wrap sheet, and if you black that's a double fluck

I decided to do something for teenagers in my community so that they would be less likely to fall victim to Late's fate. In late 2001 I started to design innovative programs for teens in Bed-Stuy, and to earn income I designed the Foot Soldiers, a street cleaning service for property owners in the community who wanted to employ teens and have their property regularly maintained. These designs slowly transformed into a business plan for my nonprofit organization called Bed Stuy's Project Re-Generation, Inc. (PR-G). I enrolled in community workshops and business trainings on community organizing, business development, negotiation, sales and leadership. College seemed to be a waste

of time for me so I took a break in 2002. I'm still on that break. I began to educate myself, reading as many books as I found relevant to my new business goals. I leveraged my self education with the entrepreneurship skills I gathered in high school.

At that point in my life, I decided it was time to go on a pilgrimage for success. All I had to take with me on this new path was my name and experiences. I detached myself from anyone that might be dead weight. With the consent of Simone, I quit my city job. All energy went into PR-G and professional development. A family with two incomes became a family with one. Expenses were cut and appropriate sacrifices were made. Delayed gratification became our driving force. "Give up a little now, for a lot later" was our motto.

I entered a variety of business competitions and excelled beyond my peers. I was recognized nationally as Youth Entrepreneur of the Year three times in two years, by three different national organizations. In early 2003 my organization launched our first program we called Rites Of Passage (ROP – pronounced rope). Brothers and sisters I grew up with or was watching grow up were drowning and they needed a ROP. Young men in the community saw prison as their test of manhood, a distorted rite of passage that I had to adjust.

ROP was inspired by Late's fate and was designed as a combination of our life's experiences. When I created it I took what I believed were enticing lures that gangs used to draw members, and educational activities youth organizations used to teach its participants. ROP became a hybrid of a "gang" and a "youth program." Similar to a gang, hand signs were incorporated. Social activities, family atmosphere, open communication, a nonjudgmental environment, secrecy, honor, fighting (Marital arts), respect, protection, creed and culture were developed. Similar to a youth group, ROP offered positive values, educational workshops, community service activities, internship, positive role models and work opportunities with the Foot Soldiers.

V. FAMILY PROBLEMS

Throughout my journey my family was unable to get the amount of attention they desired. My wife is a warrior. If it came down to it in the street she would throw down against anyone for her family. But I was not able to fully balance my family and business life. Not bringing in an income for two years was beginning to affect my household. Not too many women would proudly stay married to a broke husband. But like I said, she is a warrior.

During the summer of 2004 Simone was on the train and had a physical altercation with a lady who was abusing her seven year old child. A host of passengers were watching the abuse, but when Simone got to the point where she could take it no longer, she intervened.

"Why are you hitting her like that? Do you have to do that?" Simone asked beginning to grow irritated.

"Shut up!" The stressed mother shouted in a rage. "You don't know what this little B*tch put me through. If you want her, you take her!" The lady shoved the little girl toward Simone.

"Do you want to come with me?" Simone asked the child.

"Yes." With that Simone held the little girl's hand and walked with her to the conductor's car where she told him to call the police. Shortly after, the mother came into the conductor's car, aggressively approached Simone and the child - there were no more words, fists began to fly.

This all happened right when the train was pulling into Chauncey St., our local train station. The conductor and a few passengers broke up the fight and Simone called me hysterically. All I made out from her flustered tone was "Chauncey Street" and "fight." I sprinted to the subway with a few brothers following my spontaneous spurt. Dashing up the block, with my trusty cane in hand I swore I was going to have to use every ounce of martial arts in me. When we got there, many of the passengers were on the platform observing the scene. Simone and the lady were both being held apart by a group of people. A few minutes after my arrival the police came and arrested the child's mother.

"Simone, why you always gotta be involved in some Sh*t?" I said to her in a disturbed voice as we were walking home. "You could have really gotten hurt."

"I won't watch something happen to no helpless child and do nothing about it," she said calmly shutting down from battle mode. .

Simone's been financially supporting our family and has not complained once. Some

of my friends call her “superwoman.” It hurts to know that I have been unable to spoil her as the queen she is. To provide her with the simple things she needs such as clothes, money, and time can be challenging. After nearly three years of few presents, she’s had her share of what money can’t buy.

At times, this pilgrimage has been exciting, pleasing, joyful, frustrating, confusing, and painful. I’ve been attempting to balance my life force, but sometimes the challenges are overwhelming. It seems as if I’m doing wrong by focusing most of my energy on PR-G, but when I look at the good it has done, and will do, it feels right. I am seeking answers for questions I do not know yet. Is PR-G and its supporters the ones that will help restore the beauty of a strong family structure in Bed-Stuy and other crippled communities like it? Should I continue with PR-G?

Just when I made the decision to close the PR-G book in my life, succumbing to my doubts and guilt regarding my negligent treatment of my family, I received a call from Mama Sheda.

The Face of Struggle—Track 11

TP—*Surviving blows got me harder/X and Garvey gave me a cause to slaughter/Skimming books got my thinking sharper/Exercise and eating right made me a stronger Son, husband and father/Not for bulls*it can't you tell by my aura?/Hold my woman late at night if she didn't bind my hand Preaksman a be jailed in the slam or minced up/In a ally way/She never stop teaching me/First lesson was time/Now I carry clocks every where like flavor flav/Flavor flav!*

*Only death a cut the rope connected to my family/Harm/ Anyone of them I swear the bands of God couldn't stop me from ripping your heart from under your rib cage/This world/Make me want to take my loved ones to a cave/So much restrictions pump me full of rage/There she go again whispering in my ears/My tense body become loose like a yogi/So la te boki poke doti note/Pardon me/That was my lost language/It comes/ When my soul/Align with 9 specific stars/It takes me to another place X2/Where at night I don't hear the sound of my mama cry a young man really don't know why I'm not being answered by the great El Sadie instead the neighborhood bum told me everything is revealed in time/Age came got me seeing things the real way/Seriousness cover the play the world ain't for boys, only men not for the weak/Live or die/Whether you see/Or you blind/When you hungry and it come time to ride/Either you pick up your sword or die **Mama stop cry/We ain't going die we will survive/The soul of victory is with I/With we/Preaksman B-Bus Give me a poem/Give me a poem.***

B—*Often I imagine myself trapped in a coffin/Coughing up more blood than gramps last time I saw him/Talking to myself “Not gonna die like this.”/Carving into coffin lid bi-ra-gliffs/Ankbs, pictures of life engraved b4 me/Claustrophobic – Sh*t/ Never knew I was claustrophobic hold me/Naked and scared sea sick/Praying to God laying in vomit and feces/Wanna murder the guard/But the lash from his whip/Make me wanna jump ship/Cause, I rather die like a man/Than live like this!/Close my eyes into the great abyss/So la te boki poke doti note/Is what I said when I swore revenge/They killed my family and all my friends.*

VI. MAMA SHEDA'S INTRODUCTION

"PR-G..."

"Hello, can I speak with Barnabas?"

"This is him," I said in a distressed tone.

"Barnabas, this is Mama Sheda. What's going on pumpkin?"

"Hey Mama, I'm aight, you know how the grind gets..." I said disheartened.

"Excuse me!" she said, "I don't expect that tone from my baby. What's wrong?"

There goes Mama, she can always sense when I'm down and out. And there's nothing I can do but tell her the truth or else! "Mama, I'm feeling real low. I've been working on PR-G for nearly three years, at least 60 hours every week. Working my a*s off to save the block...I mean...I know why I'm doing it, but I feel like I shouldn't." Mama's a great listener; she always stays completely silent until I finish spilling my guts.

"You know Mama, I created this organization to fix the family (structure) issues in Bed-Stuy, but I'm having problems in my home, with my family. Simone and I had a...misunderstanding two days ago over some real stupid Sh*t."

"Misunderstanding...what happened?" She said in her comforting voice that made me want to tell her everything.

"Mama, ever since Simone and I got married she knows I have trouble sleeping with the lights and TV on. When I'm ready to sleep everything goes off. Recently she's been having trouble sleeping. Two nights ago around 12 O'clock I asked her to turn the TV off, I wanted to sleep. She told me no...I tried to sleep, but it wasn't working...again I asked her and was told no. In my tired state I began to get highly upset. I got up and turned the TV off, unplugged it, turned off the lights and went back on the air bed. She got upset...started saying all kinds of Sh*t. She irritated me but I ignored her. When she realized it wasn't working, she picked up our son Zaid, and started talking with him real loud just to aggravate me. I was getting real upset. This went on for a moment, and then she miscalculated and called me a "B*tch." Mama, she knows that's a button that she shouldn't push. I told her in the past never to do that. It infuriates me...she repeated it multiple times. I got real frustrated. I tried to refrain myself from losing control. I warned her in a very stern way to hush her mouth, but she continued. Mama, I started to feel the burn of anger in my soul. Rage began to bloom in my heart and it took control. It was obvious she wouldn't stop...so I stopped her.

"Go on," she said.

"I...stopped...her!" I said implying that I utilized physical force.

“She got real upset. Started saying all kinds of crazy Sh*t. In anger and tears she took Zaid then left the room. I locked the door after her...and that was that for the night.”

“Ahh... man Barnabas you didn't hit her did you?”

“No! I didn't hit her I grabbed her neck and pushed it towards the floor!” I said trying to lower the seriousness of my actions. “And besides, I told her not to ever call me a B*tch, that's verbal abuse! I could have said something to her that would have devastated her, but instead of doing that I just shook some sense into her. I rather somebody grab me than speak destructive words to me.”

“No Barnabas. Physical force is the worse form of abuse.”

Obviously, Mama was shocked at the whole situation. She was disappointed in both Simone and my actions. “Mama, I don't want to fight with Simone...I love her very much, I don't know why I let myself loose control...I want to say it's because of the TV, but maybe it's deeper than that. I know we don't want to hurt each other. Do you know anywhere we can go for help?”

“Yeah, I have an uncle that's a marriage counselor. I'll call you back with his number, I'm sure he'll be able to help you guys. Don't worry baby, we all make errors in judgments. You're not a bad guy, just an idiot for getting married so young.” She said with a slight bit of wit.

Can a Man Change if he Finds Love? – Track 4

TP—*Is this love/Nah it can't be love/Could it be?/ Nah I'm going crazy/But we talk all through the night/Man/Sooner or later we going start to fight/But I see her doing every thing right/I can't trust her give her a chance she take my cake/Take my meal/Take my heart and tear it apart It's fragile like glass she could shatter my ass/All my life I been scared a love, walked the nights all my life I ain't scared of thugs, but I swear in the night when I'm holding love, my heart is in another place, blood racing through my veins/Her presence burying my pain/Is she a siren sent to crash my boat? blinding me aint no one here to pull my coat to watch my back, protecting my neck she gone burst my bubble filled with hope/Preaksman/In a well/By himself/With no rope/Looking for hope.*

TP—*I'm drowning in her love In her wetness in her thighs in her eyes/Kissing her lips/ caressing her hips/Learning her body/Putting it together like a puzzle's bits/And when I go inside/She cries/Tears of joy tighten up holding me close/She loves the boy/Man fluck! I don't know her I'm a playa all I want is the skunt/Look the man in the mirror/Watch/His/Eyes/Watch his face/I see/Beauty and beast/She came into my life all the ugliness cease now TedP at peace/Can a man change if he finds love?/Think I found one that could give me all I want/I'm looking in the mirror/I see something differ/I'm a changed man a, changed man.*

B—*You remind me of my essence --- my first breath/You weren't my first _____ but when I touched you - they felt like my first breast/ Ain't want me as a teen it hurt my chest/If I'da gotten shot I'da cursed-tid death – Reversed-tid breath/Til it hurt-tid less/ Grow old, lonely, and die _____ A fountain of youth/Is worth-id less/Got you cause I persist who else deserves this?/you and me like _____ patients and nurses/Thieves and purses/ A boss and what his perks is _____/Sinners and churches/If preacher ain't around/English class adjectives, and nouns/Roaches and mice/ In the hood on the ground/I love you/I know you love me now/Working on that house _____/you got the white blouse _____/Your fam is my fam now/I gave you my seed I'ma give you my soul give you my soul, give you my soul.*

“Barnabas...now that I've listened to you, and helped you deal with your issue, I need your assistance in return.”

“What's popping Mama? You know I would do anything for you... except die.” I said returning her prior wit.

“I need your help with Yemay.” Akin-Yemay, which means born to be a warrior, is Mama Sheda's son.

“He was in the street life hard, but some time before Bengi died he enrolled him into a Martial Arts Dojo, and things have been getting better. However, he needs much more

developing. He's only using the martial arts to focus on developing his physical. He's in a GED program too, but I just feel that he's missing something."

"What you think he's missing Mama?"

"PR-G, Barnabas...PR-G and everything you guys offer to them kids. The only positive friends he has are at the Dojo...that's cool, but I want more for him...he needs to see and experience more."

No one ever says no to Mama. Sh*t, I felt honored that she wanted her seventeen year old son to come under PR-G's wing, after I just told her about my mishap with Simone. I guess she saw the King in me. "Mama, have Yemay call me tonight. Russell Simmons gave me some tickets to take about 20 teens to the screening of *Coach Carter*, Yemay may like it. This is the first step in him joining the PR-G family. Anyway Mama, I'm feeling much better now. I want to finish writing some of these proposals. Thank you for listening and believing in me."

"No Barnabas, thank you, and I'll always listen to you baby...just don't lose control again, or I'll kick your ass!"

VII. AKIN-YEMAY'S LIFE

It has been a full year to date since Yemay has been studying Shotokan Karate-Do, an “empty handed” fighting form of Martial Arts.

Our First Concern – Hidden Track

*B - Train em how to take your sidearm out of your hands/ To stand his grounds circled by five of your mans/ Take a whupping and stand falling's not an option/ We let it fill till it burst man, we don't pop Sh*t/ We don't start Sh*t But surenuff finish it/ Best part of mortal combat is to finish him/ A Ronin should always stand strong/ If something should weaken him He should never fall/ If he happens to fall He should rise/ If he can't rise another Ronin be by his side/ Pull him up, wipe his eyes shelter his cries/ We in a world that's dark we walk with open eyes/ We train with fist, guns, books, and knives/ Just in case we have to open your behind/ I mean your ass, guts, face your mind/ We warriors, in peace we train not to die/ In war we train to take your whole head off/ We all hood it's what we live for/ we love our neighbor, it's who we'll die for/ Patients...we got more than bills dog/ Virtuous by nature but if we have to kill y'all/ The pride we take in our Fam, man/ Love em so much, give em our right hand/ Goal's to lead you out of free slavery/ The reach of the white man.*

TP - My brother Bus rock dreads fully knowing in combat somebody could be pulling on his head/ So grappling locking choking and popping was the training/ For the day the man with the intention of killing him didn't know what he was facing/ He couldn't fathom/ What had happened/ How does someone as thin as a shoe lace attack with the strength of a bull rocking a calm face?/ Press on without the fear of catching a fabricated case/ Every time he turned down taking the life of a man a notch is on his cane/ The respect for living got him giving you a pass without shame/ As long as your hands/ Stay in its lane/ Cause he like Jeeeeesus/ But smack his cheek he turn to the other side/ Where you seeeee/ A hell of a lot a demons.

*B - My brother TeddyP's a beast he's a Clingon/ Shotokan/ Swing break your leg, head arm/ His knuckle game be like a head on collision/ Don't speak much be silent as F%#/ But you don't wanna fight that man bro! you wanna duck/ He don't like grappling, he aint like Bus/ Fist and feet swift as F%# beat seeking missiles that'll lift your butt/ He's gracious a gentlemen calm and Sh*t/ Avoids problems like unwanted jaM-i-LY/ But when they come he welcomes em in/ Part monster/ Swings with his hip it might launch ya/ 5 or 10 feet/ Depends on stomach or teeth/ So keep your distance, don't think cause he ain't talking be ain't listen/ If you push his button don't call Bus, cause he ain't listening/ Make your own bed/ Dug your own grave/ You gon have to lay in that hole that you made/ Trying to live off of an attack from this cat/ Is like trying to live off of Kool Aide.*

TP - The closest kept secret TeddyP/ Letting out of the bag/ A man's life/ Is all that he have/ Before death a man's mission/ Is all that he had/ So he trained in the heat cold and rain ignoring people calling him insane/ After his nightly reading before bed/ Not to be tested/ Was/ His/ Only prayer/ Cause he know the dojo make your body close to invincible make your spirit close to unbreakable/ The goal/ To make your mind body soul unshakeable/ How is this achieved/ When you push the physical you push the spiritual/ So the punches and fighting and the kicks is the/ Preparation/ For the day of your trial/ Hope you pass with colors flying/ And if I didn't say it before/ To mentally wage war against your enemy is twenty five times more violent/ Than attacking in the night with a nine millimeter that's silent/ Throw your 7's up under the full moon/ Ronin/ Is you riding?/ Cause I'm riding brace yourself we colliding/ We colliding.

Bengi, Yemay's stepfather, told him about the art's many benefits. Yemay reluctantly joined Ali Ryu Shotokan as a pastime. Seven months into his training he started taking Shotokan seriously. This new passion helped him to gradually fade away from the negative street life he had once held dearly.

As he reached his first year of training his punches and kicks became stronger, more genuine, and more intense. He was beginning to visualize a target every time he executed a technique. At first he was practicing the art's various katas with little effort. But now he executed the forms of blocks, stances, and limb locking maneuvers with great intent, strength, force, rhythm, and fluidity.

Every night at 8:30 p.m. after class usually ended, Yemay would jog home to Tompkins projects. One evening after class, he made his way up Myrtle Avenue, which was filled with life. He crossed Marcus Garvey then Throop Avenue. As he moved slowly down Throop, he noticed one of his best friends that disappeared for about two years standing in front of Key Food.

VIII. A COMPLACENT OLD FRIEND

“Yo wud up Reem!” He said with excitement as he approached his childhood friend.

“Yem! Whud up Sun?” K-Reem said excitedly. They both slowly extended their right hands and strongly grabbed the other’s forearm exchanging the old special greeting. Together along with one other leader they ran their own gang, group, clique, fraternity, or whatever you feel comfortable calling it. BKG, Black King Gang. A unit was in existence in six high schools throughout NYC. It was camaraderie, a family, a kinship of brothers and sisters that predominantly came from similar neighborhoods. The majority of BKG members’ families were in turmoil. 90% of them lived in improvised single parent households and had multiple siblings. They all had problems! But when they were together as BKG, they were feared, respected, and powerful. All of their troubles were forgotten. “Got your back in this life and the next” was their motto. This single creed was created by Mickey, K-Reem, and Yemay, BKG’s founding fathers.

As they finished their five second hand greeting, Yemay asked K-Reem, “Where have you been all these years, fam? You just disappeared without saying Sh*t. Even your mom ain’t know where you was!” K-Reem picked up his shirt and pointed at his stomach which held four small circular battle scars, which answered the question without words.

“It was over some stupid Sh*t sun, my fault mainly...I shouldna been selling this Sh*t in the Bronx. I was caking and some jealous Ni%# wanted me to leave. BKG for life! You know we hard headed, I ain’t go no where. He came back later with two of his mans...they lit me up and split. But as you can see them cowards didn’t kill me! Had some bundles on me while I was bleeding; the ambulance and pigs came and scooped me up. Now I only hustle in the Stuy where the guns are close.”

“So you got locked?” Yemay said knowing exactly what happened.

“Yeah, had a few fights, read a few books, but I’m out now. However brotha! It’s a new day and that’s enough about me, what’s good with you?”

“I’m living, still under Mama’s roof, doing this GED Sh*t, and working part-time as a security guard. It’s tough making six dollars an hour, but you know how the grind get.”

“They hiring?” K-Reem asked out of habit, but Yemay knew K-Reem sought street money and not a job.

“Yeah, but you can’t let them know you been in the bing, cause your ass won’t get hired. They got this dude that’s been outta the can for like eight months and has been working there for about six.”

“That means they don’t do background checks...let me get your math sun, I don’t have a phone right now.” K-Reem handed Yemay a pen.

Yemay wrote down his phone number on a paper bag that was lying on the pave next to his right foot. As K-Reem took the piece of paper with Yemay’s number, he asked him “What’s popping with BKG?”

Yemay smirked and began, “Since you left, Mickey has been out in Brownsville, smoking maaad weed, drinking hard, pimping, he got about three kids, selling crack, pushing a Benz, and that ni%# still robbing grocery stores. I can’t name something he ain’t doing. He turned Blood a while back, now he got OG status and he’s loonier than ever. You and Mick disappeared and I started doing my own thing, you feel me. All the units we had just evaporated into prison, the grave yard or they’re wasting their lives on the block.” Yemay wanted to tell K-Reem that Mick was dead, but he couldn’t.

He knew Reem had a vengeful spirit and would spend the rest of his life hunting the bastards that did it.

Mickey Lost his Life – Track 8

TP — Mickey died, we was like god forbid clepto, got clapped though when he robbed this kid/Mickey hungry/Rob like he had too/Take your Sh*t walk away and never pat you/Straight thug, slay thugs, stuck em for pay stubs, no make up, run up in the bodega, everybody face up!/Mickey wild, had a child, loved em to death/Had a fight in school little Mickey told the principle "Daddy put a slug in your chest!" /Mickey was proud, that's my child/Mickey was loud/Celebrated by sticking a vic Mickey was foul/Calm when he sober, when buzzed off them drugs he stick a rich cat buy the whole block lugs/Admired by them kids so much, you'd think they was blood/Walked around screw face, Mickey making little thugs/They like "Mick lemme hold something!" /He give them a buck/Robin Hood in the hood not giving a F%# "Mickey duck!" I screamed out/When them motherF%#ers from the other side rolled up/I saved your life/Maybe now you let me role out when you banging with my older brother Bus/Late night/Hospital bed you laid out 2 weeks passed/Something, ain't, right/You survived once, Mick, Won't you survive twice?/Bus coming home three in the moorning/Telling me "Mickey gave up the fight." Gave up the fight, Gave up the fight.

B — I knew Mick we went to school together/Older friend turned into older brother/He was doing what he had to, to withstand the weather/He never said was thug the street said he was thug/They know, respect him or you catching a slug/One day I'm in the park Mickey crept up/"Bus man, how you doing can we talk?"/I said spit, he said "where to start?/I had to pimp that B*tch/Beautiful, problems at home no money, no friends and Sh*t/Fell in love with me/I'm broke, said for you Mick I'll sell my Sh*t/My head started ringing off like bells and Sh*t/Dob started coming in I couldn't help that Sh*t/Go to 40 duce for more help and Sh*t/Now I got a flock of hoes closet full of clothes/Mouth full of gold heart full of cold/Only God can judge me/Look at my face dog, the truth is ugly!/I only chill with those few thugs who love me/Others hate but their fate is not to love/Bed Stuy!" He cried/"The life that I live so strife/The full life of this kid/Throat sliced another one shot in his rib/If I grow old you'll be shocked if I did/I see it now/Mom going ballistic/Laying on the ground another statistic/Bus I'm twisted/My whole heart blistered/Pimp, thug, gangsta my mom wont kiss me/You know how they get them ole loyal Christians/Praying to the Lord but the God ain't listening/I had a dream you can call it a vision/4 nS%*s rode up on me and one of my B*tches Bus, my son was me/All the grimy Sh*t caught up with me/Took long enough for the grim reaper to catch me/For the grim reaper to catch me."

“Damn.....Yem, we use to be some wild mothaF%#as! Remember that time we had beef in East New York because some stupid ni%# told Mickey’s sister, she had nice lips for sucking dick. The next day, we had to be like 70 deep out there. You holding the tech-9 in the middle of the crowd...Dana pointing Ni%#s out left and right. We was beating any motherF%#a down who we *thought* did that Sh*t.” Reem laughed out loud as the image of the past became clearer. Yemay cracked a smile not finding the memory quite as funny as Reem did.

Reem continued. “But, I’ll never forget what you did when we caught the ni%# that said it.” He said laughing almost hysterically.

“I almost peed my pants when you stood in front of sun and told him to stick his tongue in the nozzle of the tech after we already beat the Sh*t outta him. I swore we

were all going to jail...your crazy ass took that bullet outta your pocket, stooped down holding the Sh*t in front of his bloody ass face and told sun, this is going in you one way or the next. When you pushed it through sun's lips, I ain't think he was gonna swallow it, but watching that lump move down his throat was the funniest Sh*t I ever seen in my life! Shhh-eee-it, I woulda rather died than swallow that Sh*t! I guess it worked out for the best though, cause that same day in the park you met that fine yella chick with the phat ass that fell in love with the thug in Yemay, and stole him away from Shameka."

Yemay had been trying to bury his past for the last year and here came K-Reem rambling about whatever he could remember.

"That was a different time K-Reem," Disgraceful feelings towards the past began to increase in Yemay so he evaded the comments.

"Yea man.....So we are the last of the Mohicans huh?" K-Reem said softly, realizing that the scars from the past run deeper under Yemay's skin.

"That's what it is, my brother, that is what it is."

"Aight Yemay, I'm going to holla at you."

"No doubt," Yemay said as their encounter came to a close.

"I hope you're still writing them ill ass poems!" K-Reem turned around and told Yemay as the distance between the two increased.

Yemay didn't respond as he noticed a blue Ford Bronco with dark tints and an American flag hanging off a pole in the back pass by with, "U.S. is at war, Bush needs you" stickers plastered all over it. "Bush needs you, my nuts!" Yemay said in disgust.

As he entered his building on the cool summer night, the familiar scent of hemp could be smelled upon entry. Local kids were playing their usual game of skelly on the first floor's brick colored tiles. They regularly building hop, but for the past couple of nights Yemay's building has been their game court. They ranged between the ages of 6 through 12, and every single one of them knew the dirty word dictionary from front to back. There was snot nose Pete who fought anyone "gigging" on his raggedy sneakers; Lancy, who had the swiftest tongue out of the bunch, and Ericka, the only girl in the crew. On top of that, she had the fighting ability that would make Roy Jones run if she were a little bit bigger; they were the projects' future leaders, the future Mickey's, K-Reem's, and Yemay's.

IX. SHAMEKA

Yemay pressed the elevator button under a sign that read, "There will be no water in the building from 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Thursday December 2nd." When the elevator came, crack-head Josey came out reeking as usual, and he was most likely responsible for the #1 on the floor. It was rumored that he possessed a bachelor's degree, and had a good job, but went crazy when his wife suddenly left him. There are numerous rumors behind her departure, but another man is the main one that was in circulation. He began using drugs, lost his city job, and started living on the streets. Despite all of his misfortune, people still showed him love in the neighborhood. At any cookout, he is guaranteed a share of barbeque chicken and macaroni pie.

The elevator stopped at three and Yemay's ex-girlfriend boarded. She was his first love, or what he thought was love when he was 15 years of age. A product of a broken home, she already had two kids and she was 17. She fought just about every female her age or size that lived in Tompkins projects. With all the fights that she had, plus the kids, you would think she looked like an old fighting pit-bull that won every last one of its battles and retired, but that's far from the truth. Shameka's about 5'4, caramel complexion with only a thin two inch scar under her left eye from an old confrontation. She's toned possessing apple size breasts, a small waist, and a beautiful onion shape behind. This made her one to be wrecking with. Maintaining the reputation of one of the best looking girls that live in Tompkins is a hell of a task, but she does it.

"What's up Yemay?" She said with the sensual voice of a siren. Slowly licking her lips as she boldly approached him, she slightly turned her back towards him and gently rubbed her behind against the front of his jeans. Shameka timed him everyday. An hour before Yemay is expected in she is at her window waiting, and watching. She makes sure they come in contact as much as possible, even if it's for a brief moment. It could be in the lobby, the stairway, or on the elevator. She usually dresses in something revealing and sexy, gathering up all of her charm to relentlessly unleash it on Yemay with every sexual motion and sound that she can muster.

"You know? I still have a crush on you Yemay. I know you want me, but you keep fighting. It's been a while since we been together, but we could make it work."

The elevator came to the fifth floor and she held the door open as usual with Yemay telling her the same thing she hears in a different form every time they meet.

"You come with too many responsibilities, baby. I got my own cross to carry. I gotta get my life in order." Yemay had a lot of love for Shameka, he would never tell her this,

but he secretly looked forward to their encounters. The time it was going to take to get his life in order couldn't be given to anything else but finding himself. Besides, she had a man and Yemay knew she had a lot of love for what he could do for her...fresh clothes, hairdo's, nails, and expenses for girls' nights out. In exchange he got "some." The majority of their arguments stemmed from him not getting enough. He was an inept partner when she compared him to Yemay.

X. BENGI'S DEFEAT

As Yemay walked down the long hall toward his apartment he began to reflect on his family; two little brothers, a younger sister and one steel-strong mother living under the same roof.

Mama Sheda – Track 3

B — *Mama seen ma story before it end/No peace no glory no ones true friends/No peas and rice/No breeze for kites/So many people are dying aint no reasons why/Mama why it end up so?/Why your children bate each other for?/Mama why it end up so?/You know it woulda happen why you make us for?*

TP — *Barnabas and Preaks make mince out of beef classics out of beats follow my creed Bana/Personify the struggle huddle and subtly plot gotta make it/The law I shake it/Like limbs falling asleep kid/The pops I never knew I heard beat up cops/Rocking his reads/Smoking his L./Gave me a pull before I was 12/This is all that we see/The only image to me/The Lord can't save me I save me!/And I don't blame Him because I'm hungry/I got two hands and two feet/Wisdom longer than the bead wrap on a Indian priest ability to walk on sleet/My dough I want it to start building from where Bill Gates peak-I dress not neat/Loyal to my brothers we in the movement/So when they see us they cuff us/They don't want you hearing what we say/They want you to stay they clay/Mold you/Give you a couple dollars And fold you/Look at Simpson and Kobe/White "brauds" still get gods hung/Same song sung/Under pressure feel like I got one lung/So I am riding Biatch/Ra ra riding biatch.*

B — *Mama raise me on she own/No shoes no jewels but we had a home/Mama raise we on she own/No shoes no jewels but we had a home*

TP — *That bottle of paint was one tool a my fame/Tagging my name along side the mural/Which is a yearbook everybody sign when you graduating from life/Ya time done came my brethren was slain/He was no lame/It's just that mother f-ers is crooked like the neck on a crane/They'd yap you for ya chain after making a deal with your dame/We grew in this concrete jungle the rain is the pain/Seeping through the earth caressing our roots from this poplar tree TedP the reincarnated strange fruit done came/Crazy right?/ But the sane is looked at as being insane to the insane/Don't hold no yella belly pussy or dick under my wing not Fruit-of-the-looms or Hanes/Back in ya lane this MY street! Sharing, not in the plan walk that road applying knowledge out of the can/Read and practice Karate Do break your nose, jaw, cheekbone with one blow/Pick up my sleeves/Those arms blow/Heart running out of fears, face running out of tears/They want to put holes in my dickies I'm willing to die for my cares/Hoe F%#er! You no friend of me get off my dicky cause these bullets are driven by drunk drivers/They swerve/Not knowing how to stay straight when they jump into your belly cluck, clucky what you thought it wasn't with me? Wouldn't want to be your draws Sh*t B I'm a problem/A dozen Meineke's couldn't fix me.*

B — *Mama feel me, mama bear me/Mama wipe the eyes of your only child/Mama why it end up so?/Why your children bate each other so?/Mama raise we on she own/No shoes no jewels but we ha a home/*

Yemay had trouble sleeping after his youngest sibling's father opened the window, jumped, and flew into the currents of breeze that floated past their fifth floor apartment.

Bengi was Yemay's sister's dad; he was the only man Yemay ever considered a father, and the man credited for introducing him to Martial Arts. Bengi listened to him when he needed ears, and had a developed mind to give advice. In return, Yemay started to understand what it meant to be a man. Bengi spoke of loyalty, discipline, honor, love, family, courage, sacrifice, leadership, wisdom, understanding, patience and compassion. All of these necessary character traits floated into Yemay's ear intertwined with stories of Bengi's turbulent past.

One night Yemay pushed his key into the lock of his front door at about 2 o'clock in the morning. As he came in he felt a draft, and heard whimpers coming from the living room. He looked in and saw the window wide open with Bengi on his knees crying as if his spirit had been totally destroyed.

"Are you all right?" Yemay asked Bengi. Bengi looked up, and their gazes met. Tears were streaming out of his bloodshot eyes, his nose oozed mucus; seeing this all caused the hairs on Yemay's forearm and neck to stand up. Goosebumps then covered every part of his body. Bengi slowly raised his hand clenching a piece of paper and started reading. "Dot, dot, dot, dot...a dot for every day I spent in the pen. 9125 dots Yemay, 25 years in isolation. No family. No friends and no woman; just eating, sleeping, Sh*ttng,

fighting, reading and the nightmares that follow lights-out. I killed, sometimes just out of frustration...the people that lost their lives by my hands haunt me Yemay. When I'm catching the train they whisper...jump. When I took the kids to the zoo, the voices kept telling me to jump into the lion's den." With lost eyes focused on Yemay's pupils and in a painful whisper Bengi began again. "When I die, your mother will feel great pain Yemay...I want you to know that if you get locked up or if Sheda has to put you in a grave the pain will be magnified 25 times. Don't F%# up boy, now please leave me." Bengi saw the split image of himself in Yemay, and knew every bit of pain he was going to face in his future. Seven months later Bengi accepted defeat and listened to the demons that insisted he jump. Bengi's words to Yemay prompted him to change the direction of his life.

XI. MAMA SHEDA'S WISDOM

"Goodnight everyone!" Yemay shouted as he locked the door behind him. Mama Sheda was in the kitchen putting together dinner for the family. Some of that old Guyanese cooking...baked chicken, rice and peas and some calaloo mixed with vegetables.

Yemay kissed his life giver on her cheeks as she stirred the rice in the pot. He sat at the dining table silently staring at his mother in her black head-tie and dingy white apron. She stood with her back towards him in front of the stove adding peas to the rice.

"If you got something to say, spill your guts. If not get out of my kitchen with them nasty smelling karate clothes you got in that bag. Coming in here kicking, you didn't punch and kick enough in the dojo!" Mama Sheda with a smirk on her face.

Yemay laughed. His mother is one of the few people that still made him laugh, but it came to a sudden stop, and then he began.

"Ma, I know you know that your son ain't an angel. I robbed, sold drugs, snatched purses, and jumped people for no reason while I was down with BKG. Now I'm looking back, I realize that I caused you a world of heartache."

"You damn right you did! I swear if I tossed a brick off the roof when you were younger, it wouldn't have made a dent in your hard head."

"Ma, please don't remind me."

"I'm gonna remind you! And I'm going to remind you again, and again, and again, because if you ever start that Sh*t again!..."

Mama Sheda grabbed the meat cleaver that was sitting on the dresser beside the stove, pointed it at Yemay and continued.

"I'm going to cut your tongue off and kick your ass out if you break your word. You could go live on the roof with crack-head Josey, and go wherever the hell he goes in the winter." Mama Sheda then realized her mind was revisiting the pain her son caused her, and calmed down, because she knew Yemay was looking for answers on his path of change.

"Ma, on my way home I saw K-Reem."

Mama Sheda's heart skipped a beat at the mention of his name.

"He started showing me scars from bullets that ran through his stomach, told me he's been locked up... Ma...back in the days I did the same grimy things he did, if not more... Bengi told me about Karma, and I think it's going to hit me. What do I do?"

"Son, you need to live your life," Mama Sheda said slowly laying down the meat

cleaver she used to threaten his tongue. She then picked up a kitchen towel that hung on a handle of the kitchen cabinet.

“There are two endings in life.” She told him as she wiped the moisture from her hands with the towel.

“There is the end where all the life in your body leaves to another place, your physical being is buried, and your body deteriorates. And there’s the end of the sleep, which prevents you from seeing the right path to walk on. Some are on the wrong path not knowing it’s a path towards an early grave. The good news is a person can wake from such a sleep before they are doomed. To wake from such a slumber you need a goal, you need a vision, and you need the Lord.”

“Ma, you know I don’t want to hear nothing of that church Sh*t Jesus ain’t ever had to face them pigs every time he opened his front door,” Yemay said angrily. He had a lot of doubts and confusion regarding religion.

“I was looking through your room while you were gone...”

“Ma you still don’t trust me!” Yemay said rising from his seat.

“Boy you betta sit your ass back in that chair if you know what’s good for you!” Mama Sheda shouted while looking Yemay right in the eyes until he sat back down.

“I came across this poetry book of yours; all those curse words had me ready to burn it.” She bent over, pulled open the oven door, and pushed her hand in bringing out the book. She began flipping through it, stopped on a page towards the end, and read a line that Yemay wrote.

“It was not wool that was over my eyes, my eyes were simply closed, it is only the blind that cannot see.”

“Son I know these words came from your heart. It tells me your eyes are opening. Call this number before you sleep,” Mama Sheda opened up the cabinet drawer and took out Barnabas’ card handing it to Yemay and continued. “I want you to meet a friend of mine. His name is Barnabas. He is taking a couple of kids around your age to the screening for a movie where Russell Simmons is going to be the key speaker, and you could attend it with them. I already told him about you, and he is excited at the possibility of having PR-G work with you. Be not afraid Akin-Yemay, when a person decides to wake, the sun will shine...now go in the room and make sure them kids are doing their homework.”

XII. Barnabas Meets Akin-Yemay

As Yemay picked up his book pack, Mama quietly said, "Only Jesus could deal with this one." Yemay laughed as he walked towards his room clutching the card in his hand.

As Yemay waited on the curb near his building in anticipation of meeting this "Barnabas," he noticed K-Reem approaching him with a group of about fifteen people. Most of them had familiar faces. It looked like the reincarnation of BKG. Handshakes were exchanged, and K-Reem started debriefing Yemay about his plans to recreate BKG. As they were speaking, a 2004 dark blue tinted Chevy Avalanche pulled up to the curb. The window on the driver side rolled down slowly.

"Peace! One a ya'll name Yemay?" Barnabas asked the group of teenagers.

"Yem, you know this nig\$%?" K-Reem asked preparing to tell the stranger that there was no Yemay here.

"Nah sun, that's my man, I'm bout to roll out with him. Y'all gonna be aight?"

"Yeah man we good, bout to go to the park, shoot some hoops and smoke some weed. We gon talk about that thing later fam...be easy."

Yemay made his way towards Barnabas' truck saying good bye to his childhood friend for what would be the last time. Shortly after they parted, K-Reem and his friends got into an altercation in the park. K-Reem was shot in the head execution style.

"I thought you wasn't coming no more." Yemay told Barnabas as he got into the truck.

"And leave you out here to shoot hoops and smoke weed...you must be out your goddamn mind, young blood."

BARNABAS SHAKUR and TEDDY PREAKSMAN

It's challenging to recall what moment actually began their relationship, but they are pretty sure the year was 1998. In high school they had a mutual friend, which sparked their bond. After graduating from high school they both went to New York City Technical College where they began sharing ideologies, experiences, visions and rhymes. In 2003 they agreed that the community needed their leadership and forged a brotherhood. Together they have become brothers, partners in music/literature and activists in family/community development.