

Los Angeles Sentinel



STREET SURVIVAL 101

■ AQUIL BASHEER

Born Again Black Men

Sam Sr. loved taking Sam Jr. to the local barbershop. It was amazing but this was the one place Sam Jr. actually looked forward to going with his Father even at 16. He couldn't put his finger on why he just knew he could not wait for his hair to grow out so he could ask his Father to take him to the shop.

Of course his father knew why Sam Jr. liked going with him, yes he knew. It was the camaraderie of being around the older men, the men telling the stories about coming up in the old days and how if you said you were a man you had to be courageous, fearless, and strong. Not just physically strong but psychologically resilient! Times back then were a lot harder, you had to be mentally sharp and you had to be tough. Having courage and being brave was automatic! This was a time when men had respect for each other, they took care of their families and they raised their children. It was a time of pride and dignity.

Sam Jr. loved hearing the stories from the older men. He felt he could listen for hours, no, all day if his father would let him! Sam Jr. would always wonder to himself, "What happened to all those men?" Why don't we have men like those men anymore? Where did they all go? Although he had tremendous respect for his father and the men at the shop, he knew that they were rare.

As Sam Jr. was daydreaming he noticed Mr. Rock was not in the shop (they called him rock because he looked like a rock and he was also as hard as one). The elder man they called Amir, (his name was given to him by his Father which meant strong leader-commander) was the first to speak. When he spoke the shop became silent and people listened. All the Brothers, young and old, had much love and respect for this man. They knew he represented many years of valued knowledge and he always had something profound to say. "Rock is not with us today because his son was returned to the Master last night".

He was with a couple of his associates on their way home from after school practice. There was a commotion at the local eatery where they had stopped to get something to drink. Frank (Rock's son) accidentally bumped another young man in the restaurant and the young man went berserk. Frank apologized but apparently that was not enough. The young man left in a rage but came back after about ten minutes with two of his buddies. A fight broke out and Frank was shot twice as he proceeded to walk out of the front door, he died at that door.

Extreme quiet came over the barbershop. Shaheed was the first to speak. "What the hell is wrong with these young Brothers?" "They kill each other over nothing, he looked at me wrong or he stepped on my shoe, damn, they don't even need a reason to kill each other today!" Yea, Lenny chimed in; "this stuff is crazy, what has happened?" "We didn't do this crap when we were coming up. We fought but we didn't try to kill each other! Did we do something wrong?"

Again the elder, Amir, spoke up "Yes, we have done something wrong, very wrong!" We have not taught these young Brothers how to be men. The next thing he said was so profound that you could hear a pin drop for the next five minutes. "Manhood doesn't show up at the doorstep when you reach 21 and say I have arrived, it is something that has to be taught and practiced over years before it makes itself available!"

How can we condemn and chastise these young men when we have left in place nothing for them to imitate! How do we expect them to stop being violent when they use this violence to define themselves as well as their manhood? I'm not saying what they do is correct but I am saying that we have failed miserably in showing them how to be men.

Kenny was next to voice his opinion "Sure you're right Amir, we have acted

SURVIVAL: *CONTINUED FROM A-6*

liked scared dogs who when overpowered with fear run and hide." We have not protected these young Brothers or chastised them for the wrong in which they have done, nor have we acknowledged and praised them when they have excelled! You know it's a shame but too many men our age have been acting like the young men we're suppose to be setting the example for, (dressing in their styles, trying to talk like them, behaving as if we were their age) for whatever reason we have failed to mature and assume the position of leadership! Our job as their elders is to educate, direct, and guide these young men, along with reprimanding and chastising them when required.

This violence that they are spewing out in the community is never going to stop until we assume our rightful position as leaders of this community and regain the respect of these youngsters. It has gotten to a point that many of them feel we don't have anything to teach them, they feel the example that we have set is so bad that they don't want to follow whatever we put in place, they would rather learn on their own, their way.

The blame is on us, not on them. Our women don't respect us, our daughters look for mates that are opposite of the examples we put in place, our sons feel

we don't have any wisdom to give them, and society in general laughs at us because they feel we don't have any control over any aspect of our community.

We as real men have got to understand that the survival of our community lies in our hands. We are directly responsible for the carnage that we see transpiring in our neighborhoods. While many of us have attempted to provide our time and resources to battle the problem, we have to come to the conclusion that what we have been doing has not been enough and has not been sufficient to abate the problem, we must re-double our efforts and re-enforce our resilience. The sooner we understand this is not a choice but an ordered responsibility, then and only then will transformation start to happen.

AQUIL BASHEER ■ IS AN AWARD WINNING, NATIONALLY RENOWNED VIOLENCE DETERRENCE & THREAT ABATEMENT SPECIALIST WHO HAS TRAINED AND CONSULTED TO PRIVATE CORPORATIONS, STATE AND FEDERAL AUTHORITIES, AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROFESSIONALS NATIONWIDE FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS. A MARTIAL ARTS, STREET SURVIVAL GRANDMASTER AND A CERTIFIED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT EXPERT, BASHEER IS CURRENTLY THE CEO OF MAXIMUM FORCE ENTERPRISES AND THE FOUNDER OF THE B.U.I.L.D. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ACADEMY. HE CAN BE REACHED AT (323) 295-1904, OR BY EMAIL: TAKECHARGEINC@AOL.COM.