

# Los Angeles Sentinel

## STREET SURVIVAL 101

■ AQUIL BASHEER



## Youth Survival Camps

As Dara was looking out the window she saw her son's friend pull up in front of the house. She knew this boy was trouble; he wore it all over his face. She liked nothing about him, his attitude, his behavior, his lack of respect, and most importantly his arrogance. She could not understand why her son (Jaja), of all people, hung out with this boy. She has seen her son's attitude and behavior deteriorate since his association with this young man. Luckily today her son would be with her, they had a series of very important appointments they had to get to.

Dara spoke loudly "go get in the car, we've got to go"! Her sixteen year old son looks at her in disgust and rolls his eyes, f-this! I'm not getting in that damn car, I told you I'm not going anywhere; I've got some business to take care of! Dara was shocked; she didn't believe her ears. Her son had never talked to her this way before. "Who the hell do you think you're talking too"? She asked.

### Storms Out

He replies "I'm talking to you; I don't see anybody else standing over there." There is a momentary pause, he ducks as the pot of grits Dara has just finished cooking hits the wall and puts an extremely large dent in it, missing his head by inches. He accidentally (she assumes) bumps you as he storms out of the house in disgust, momentarily knocking her off her feet. She thinks about the knife she had in her hand (she was making her daughter's school lunch) and in that moment of rage how close she was to sticking that knife into her son. But she caught yourself and control took over. Dara stands there perplexed, trying to analyze what has just happened. Thinking how close she might have been to taking her son's life.

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She has noticed that since her ex-husband left, she has been going through pure hell trying to get through to this boy! He was never this way when his father was at home (actually that's not true, she did notice beginning signs of this behavior but chose to ignore it because his father kept it in check). She and Jaja's father had to separate because it was just not working; actually it had gotten pretty bad before the divorce. Dara now wonders if she could have done something to make the relationship a success. Should she have asked his father to stay based on her two sons' needs? Looking back she's pretty sure she made the right decision but she still contemplates.

### Will Never Understand

In the meantime Jaja is talking to one of his homeboys. As they talk her name comes up. "Cuz, I seriously disrespected Moms today. I didn't mean to talk to her the way I did but she be tripping sometimes. She doesn't understand how upset I am, naw, how pissed off I am! Since Pops left I have been totally confused about my life. He left right at the time I needed to know things.

"I needed information about being a man, what to do in certain circumstances and how to handle particular situations." (Jaja was 13 years of age when his father left). "Moms really tries hard but she will never understand what I'm going through, there are certain things that I could never talk to her about and even if I did the answers that she would give me would come from a female's point of view."

Jaja's homeboy replies, "Yea Homie, I know what you mean, luckily my uncle Sam still slides through now and then to rap with me, but if it wasn't for that I would be on my own too! (His father was a Marine and was killed four years earlier).

On the other side of town Mr. Hayworth is thinking about all the youth violence that has been occurring in the neighborhood over the last few months. He thinks about the conversation he has had with his sister Dara. Dara has explained to him about all the things she has been going through with Jaja. He knows that if his nephew's mindset is not changed soon, he might become a statistic of the streets.

### Respected Street Soldiers

Mr. Hayworth's reflects back on that phone conversation he had last week with his close friend Abdul. Abdul had just arrived back in town from Los Angeles and was pumped about a "Youth Survival Empowerment Camp" that he had visited. Abdul had told him the Brothers who ran this camp were taking care of some serious business. These individuals had developed a stimulating, no-nonsense, motivating program of manhood training, refinement, and constructive behavior modification.

The founder had put together a team of some of the most respected street soldiers in the community and developed a curriculum that taught self-respect, discipline, responsibility, self-worth, societal/family commitment, street survival skills, and a host of other things.

Abdul said he was so impressed when he walked in their training room and saw these young men clean, sharp, and articulating on the rules of discipline, responsibility to themselves and society, fatherhood, and training in the physical skills of street survival martial arts that it nearly floored him. There was also a comprehensive "Victory Journal" with a series of lesson plans that these young men were drilled on. Abdul could understand why this program had a three-page waiting list!

As Mr. Hayworth listened to Abdul, he thought to himself "could this be one of the answers to help eradicate some of this foolishness that's taking place in the community and help Jaja at the same time? He already knew the answer; he also knew how destructive it was for a male child not to have a father or at least a father figure in his life. He also knew how disparaging it was for that same child not to have constructive role models to pattern themselves after. He did as much as he could for his nephew but deep down inside he questioned if it was enough. He could see how angry and negative Jaja was becoming because he felt neglected, forgotten, and criticized for being young, Black, and poor.

## Walk in Their Shoes

Many of Jaja's associates had resorted to violence to prove their self worth, to gain attention, and in many cases as a way of surviving the economic pressures that they found themselves locked in. This is in no way excusing the wrong that many of them have done but it is an attempt, to some degree, to walk in their shoes.

Developing Youth Survival Camps throughout the urban environment is crucial. These camps are not just for young men but must also accommodate equally our young females who are also under the tremendous burden of trying to survive in this society today. It is fundamentally important that a workable, "duplicatable," infrastructure be put in place that teaches our youth what is expected of them, what their responsibilities are, the consequences of both taking care of /not taking care of the business, and the "life skills" of Manhood and Womanhood.

These classes must be taught by Men and Women who are street tested, who are respected for the examples they have set (inclusive of the work that they have accomplished), who are not afraid to seriously engage with the so-called high risk youth that present severe challenges, who will not be overly judgmental but who are also not fearful of challenging the destructive behavior that presents itself. These instructors must provide to the youth a demeanor that signifies determination, strength, leadership, discipline, and know-how but at the same time dictates extreme genuineness, admiration, care, and concern for their well being.

We as a community must become self-reliant and produce our own viable solutions to the ills that haunt our community. We must stop searching everywhere else and look within to deal with many of our concerns. This is not to say we don't need to seek assistance in other places outside the community, but these other locals should not be our first choice. We have to develop trust and respect for one another; this will help us realize that we do have the aptitude and competence to rebuild our communities to the luster that they were once known for.

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