





# gangsta lovin'



**They were tighter than Foxy Brown's ass in a Versace dress. Suge Knight befriended Tupac Shakur at his lowest point, and remained by his side 'til the day he died. Always outspoken, the big homie remembers everything.**

WORDS MATT DIEHL



**"After the incident occurred in New York when he got shot and robbed, most people probably sent him, you know, roses and letters. But I sent him a bulletproof vest with the Death Row logo on it. I was saying, I care about you, but, you know, I'm going to treat you like a man."**

**As a boss**, as a friend, as the one who sat beside him and took a bullet when Tupac Shakur lost his life, Suge Knight can claim a closeness to the man that not a lot of people can. Sitting at Gladstones—a seaside restaurant in Malibu that he and 'Pac used to frequent—Suge, in an exclusive interview with *XXL*, talked over the crashing ocean waves about the man he says he knew better than anyone, and the memories that won't wash away.

**XXL: How would you characterize your relationship with Tupac?**

**SUGE:** We were like twin brothers, uncle and nephew, father and son. You know, it got to the point where he always trusted me, and I always trusted him: We spent so much time together that he could finish my sentences, and I could finish his. We knew exactly what the other one was thinking. 'Pac wouldn't do a session or do a video unless I was there; if I wasn't, he acted like a fucking fool, tearing up shit and doing nothing. Then when I'd arrive, he'd say, "OK, now you're here, now we can go to work and have fun." It was his way of saying we just *tight*.

**So where did that trust come from?**

After the incident occurred in New York when he got shot and robbed, most people probably sent him, you know, roses and letters. But I sent him a bulletproof vest with the Death Row logo on it. I was saying, I care about you, but, you know, I'm going to treat you like a man. I ain't going to treat you like no baby. Shortly after that 'Pac went to prison. A lot of bad things were being said about him, and everybody basically deserted him.

**They deserted him because he was in trouble?**

When you're incarcerated, people aren't going to help you, because most people see you as an investment—not as a friend, not as a person, not as a man. Anyway, at this time he had a wife by the name of Keisha, and she called me. She said, "You don't know me, but 'Pac really, really needs to see you. He wants you to come see him." At the time I was under house arrest, and I had the little ankle bracelet thing and all that, so me getting inside a prison was not the easiest thing to do.

**Was it illegal for you to go to see him?**

Definitely. But I felt that this guy needed my help, and for some strange reason I was going to give it to him—by any means necessary. So when I walked through that metal detector and the thing went off because of my ankle bracelet, I could have been stuck right there, but I still put my freedom on the line to see what he really needed and what the problem was.



**Where was 'Pac being held?**

In a prison in upstate New York. I had to go through a lot to get there. It was so remote, I had to take a private plane from New York City to this small town, and from there we got a car and drove another hour to the prison. When I got there, 'Pac wasn't looking like himself: He had a lot of concerns on his mind. He told me he didn't have any money, that everything was going wrong, so he wanted me to buy his publishing for \$25,000. I told him, "If I do that, I'd be robbing you without a gun or a knife. What I'm going to do is this: I will give you 50 grand, but don't get rid of your publishing." He said, "But I can write more songs—I write songs all the time." I was like, "That's not the point—what's really going on with you?" So we had a conversation. I told him, "I can't get you out today, but I am going to give 100 percent to get you out of prison—and with the influence and the connections I have, I believe there's a 95 percent chance we could get you out. But once you have your freedom, you have to come out even harder, even smarter, even stronger than ever before."

**What did he tell you?**

He had my back, too: He told me that he felt that Snoop and Dre weren't stand-up guys—that they didn't have a real loyalty to me and Death Row. He said, "I know you're a loyal street nigga, and I'll give you the same loyalty."

**What was 'Pac's attitude towards life once he got out of jail?**

He had a real work ethic. He wanted to work, and it was exciting. When he first got home, he had songs already done. The first

song we did together was "Ambitionz As A Rhidah." The only people at the studio were 'Pac and myself. We played the track, 'Pac took his shirt off, had something to drink and just did it. That wasn't business—we were just doing something that was fun... I was in the studio for every single track he ever did. The reason why we worked so fast was that I was under house arrest: I lived at the studio, and 'Pac lived there right along with me. Our day would start with an enormous breakfast. Then we would get to work, take a break for dinner, go out and party, then come back to the studio and do more songs.

**How did your presence help him as an artist and as a person?**

He finally knew he had somebody who had his back, who cared about him—for him, not for him doing something. It finally hit him like, "You know what, I got somebody who likes me for me." I told him, "If you're not happy being a rapper, being an artist, you don't have to be. We will still be good friends, we'll still enjoy life and have fun"—there wasn't no pressure.

**What would you guys talk about during those times?**

He would tell me about his life, his childhood. There were no secrets. He always felt alone, because he didn't always have his family around growing up, and his friends weren't always looking out for his best interests. I told him, "Your friends are my friends, your enemies my enemies." I used to joke and tell him, "You know, you ain't never had a friend like me." Then he did a song about it, "Never Had A Friend Like Me."



fans saw 'Pac, they lost their cool and went charging after him. It wrecked the show so much that they wanted us out of there to keep the show going. But when we left, the whole place left.

**Was 'Pac a major partier?**

He was a *partier!* We'd have parties where it might be five guys and 55 girls, or 40 girls and just me and 'Pac. We would go to Cabo San Lucas in Mexico. We would be out there on little boats, we would ride the horses in the water, all these things. My yacht stayed out there, and we would live on it and have a great time. One time there were all these girls and people on the beach waving at the yacht. I said, "If you was in shape like me, we could swim over there." Pac shot back, "If your big ass can make it, I know I can make it. I have got to be in better shape than you!" I told him I didn't think he could swim that distance, but he wasn't hearing that. So we take off our jewelry and watches and both jump into the ocean. 'Pac is in front of me, doing all kinds of tricks, but me, I'm just taking my time. All of a sudden 'Pac gets tired. I'm thinking he's joking, but he's serious and says, "I need to get some rest." So he gets on my shoulders, and I'm holding him up so he can get his wind back. By now, I'm starting to get tired. At this point, we both were about to drown. I pushed 'Pac off me and said, "Come on, we've got to swim!" But he sinks straight to the bottom, so I dive in and get him. By now all these people are diving in the water to come help us. I said, "He's drowning, he needs some help!" So they all grabbed 'Pac. They take him to shore, and by the time I got there, I was so tired, I'm crawling through the sand. I'm trying to pull my trunks up, and 'Pac says, "I can't feel my legs." His trunks were falling

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**What did you guys do for fun?**

Not only did we work hard together, we played hard together. We went to clubs, strip clubs together. We went to see sports. We'd go to the beach, maybe hang in Beverly Hills at a restaurant where it might be unusual to see other Black guys there, but it wasn't unusual to see me and 'Pac there. We covered all the grounds, and there were no boundaries—you'd see us in Compton one minute and in Beverly Hills the next. We'd do everything you could possibly do to enjoy yourself in Vegas—

from the clubs to the crap tables to the pool parties—just enjoying life. It would take a person 50 years to do the stuff we did in such a short time. That's the thing that a lot of people don't understand. There are some people who live a long time but live a very short life, and there's some people who live a very short life, but in that live a very, very long time. Tupac lived way longer than someone who was 90 years old because he had done so much. It really hit him that he was a superstar when we went to an R. Kelly concert once. When R. Kelly's

down, so I pull his trunks up, and this guy is about to give him mouth to mouth. Tupac goes, "Don't let him do that!" But I said, "We've got to get the water out of your lungs"—he was turning white. So I grab him and I give him a big squeeze, and all this salt water starts pouring out of his mouth. I carried 'Pac on my shoulders all the way to the highway, where this guy put us in the back of a truck and drove us to the hospital. The doctor said, "I don't know what you did, but you got all the water out of him. If you hadn't, he would've died."



with them again. I am going to take back anything good I said about Snoop—he's a bitch, and he has hatred for us. I will be on Death Row, I'm always going to be with you, but I don't want to work with them. We don't need them—you don't need a Dre, you don't need a Snoop, you don't need none of those guys, because you got me. I love you and I'm going to work hard for you. We're doing bigger things." So when we got ready to leave, 'Pac socked Snoop and told him that he was going to beat his ass.

**How did Snoop react?**

Snoop threw up and cried and all that shit. His wife was pregnant, and he told all of us that if it's a boy, he's going to name him Tupac—which he didn't. The biggest problem that these guys had with me was

'Pac was such a good man, he might know a girl who had a sister who was the biggest whore around, who had a baby and wasn't doing shit with her life. He'd say, "You know what, she can't get a job, she keeps sleeping with everybody, she is not going to be able to take care of a child, so therefore I'm going to give her a job—I'll let her come by and maybe wash my car, or she might have sex with some of the little homies." And when 'Pac was no longer here, that same woman turned around and said, "I was 'Pac's assistant—I worked with him every day." I seen that a lot. 'Pac was definitely down for the struggle, because 'Pac went through struggle himself, so he knew what it was to struggle. He knew what it was to be without. Every year I give away toys in Compton and South Central, go to the hospitals—since even before 'Pac joined Death Row. Now, Dre is supposed to be from Compton. He never went one time to any of the schools to give toys away to the kids, he never went to one hospital. But 'Pac, at the hottest point of his career, I said, "OK, 'Pac, I'm going to Compton. I'm going there, we are going to do this for the kids," and he was never ever late. Not once. 'Pac was the perfect person to be around kids because he treated them like they was just above all the stars. That made him feel great. He was reliving his childhood life through them, giving them things that he'd wanted and couldn't have when he was younger.

**What music did 'Pac listen to? Like around the house and in the car?**

You know, it's funny. At first it was always rap. But when he rode with me, I always played oldies. He would be like, "Cut this old shit out! We're not living in the '70s!" And I'd have to tell him just listen to the lyrics—I'd give him the Isley Brothers, Sam Cooke. Once we were in Vegas and we went to go see Gladys Knight, and we took our mothers—Gladys Knight puts on the most incredible show. We looked at Gladys like she was another mother of ours, know what I mean? Gladys put a smile on Tupac's face.

**What was Tupac's favorite song?**

We always loved "A Change Is Going To Come" by Sam Cooke. The first time he heard that song in my car, it became his song. Anybody that really knew 'Pac would know that was his favorite fuckin' song.

**What rappers did 'Pac like?**

He definitely liked Scarface.

**Are there any rappers out today that you see continuing 'Pac's legacy?**

There will never be another Tupac. It's like people say there won't be another Muhammad Ali or Michael Jordan. Actually it's funny, because I signed two rappers recently, and both of these rap-

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After that, 'Pac was like, "I ain't doing no more swimming in the ocean."

**What was 'Pac's creative process like?**

If something happened out of the ordinary, he would turn it into a song. A lot of things that 'Pac wrote in songs could be either about his life or somebody close to him. Like if he talked about something his father told him, it's based on what my father told me, because I was raised with my biological father and 'Pac wasn't. 'Pac did a song where he said that he got a price on his head, you know, and he's got three children and so on and so on. 'Pac didn't have any kids—I had the three kids. So 'Pac would take a person that he cared about or liked or looked up to and put them into a song. He'd get into their minds, their soul.

**Was 'Pac always loyal to Death Row?**

I know 'Pac loved me without a doubt, and he definitely loved Death Row. People say 'Pac didn't want to be on Death Row no more, but that wasn't true. 'Pac didn't want to work with Snoop no more. What happened was, Snoop went to the radio station and said he don't know what 'Pac is doing—don't listen to what 'Pac is talking about. Snoop then said that he would do a song for Puffy and a song for Biggie. When Snoop did that, 'Pac banged on my door and said, "Turn on the radio real quick—this bitch-ass muthafucka is dissing me! He's going against me, saying he would do songs with people who I don't like. I gave it up for everybody on Death Row because you fuck with them, but I can never fuck

that I was always going to be on 'Pac's side. Everybody was jealous of 'Pac.

**What was 'Pac really like with women?**

Well, let's put it like this: How many times have you heard 'Pac say "Money over bitches"? 'Pac wasn't about to get married and change his life for a woman. When 'Pac wasn't here to speak for himself, a lot of people tried to gain fame by saying that they were his woman... 'Pac didn't find no woman who would be that close to him, where he could say, "This is the woman I want to marry." If 'Pac did say something like that, it was four in the morning after three bottles of Cristal.

**Who was the "real" 'Pac? Was he a player? Was he a gangsta? A thug? A poet? An activist for the community?**

Tupac was a gift to the world. And if 'Pac was going to be a thug and a gangster, he was actually going to be a thug and a gangster. He was actually going to participate in that type of lifestyle. And if he was going to be a player, he was going to play. What made our relationship so great was that I never tried to change him. A lot of people take credit for Tupac's career, but I take that credit. I created him.

**If 'Pac were alive today, what would he be doing?**

'Pac would still be in movies. In music, he'd still be doing that gangsta shit, that club shit. But you've got to realize one thing: More people benefited from 'Pac not being here than 'Pac being here. A lot of people are able to be in business today by saying they were involved with 'Pac.



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pers have a part of 'Pac in them. One of them, Crooked Eye, he's a worker like 'Pac. And then there's Eastwood, who's as loud and crazy as 'Pac. He won't go to a club until he's looking right, and that's how 'Pac was. It makes me laugh being involved with these guys, because I see a lot of his reflection in them. Ja Rule also has ways and flavor like 'Pac, but he's not doing it in a disrespectful way. He knows he's Ja Rule, but everybody else tries to steal 'Pac's image. If 'Pac were still alive, it wouldn't be no problem having Ja hang with me and 'Pac, because 'Pac would have liked him. The rest of them, other than Treach and Scarface, I can't say that about. Me and Lisa ["Left Eye" Lopes] became tight because I knew she cared about 'Pac. They were friends, and 'Pac respected her. There's a song on her solo album, "Untouchable," with her and 'Pac together. One of her fantasies was that

she always wished she could've done a song with 'Pac, and now I've fulfilled that fantasy. But nobody can never have the relationship that me and 'Pac had.

**What would you be doing with 'Pac's career if he hadn't died?**

If 'Pac was here right now, I would have 'Pac playing arenas and doing songs strictly for women. He had that charisma where the guys love what he does because he keeps it ghetto and gangsta, but at the same time, he was able to do songs that would make women go crazy.

**What's something that people don't know about Tupac?**

That he wasn't forgiving. If he really cared about you, he really cared about you. There's a lot of people who would say, "Me and 'Pac was close when we was younger, but then we grew out of touch, and I never heard from him again." It wasn't by accident. 'Pac didn't lose touch with

people—he just wasn't going to deal with muthafuckas who didn't care about him. He grew up and got smarter.

**Is 'Pac as big today as he was when he was alive?**

Tupac is in a class all by himself—he's the ghetto Elvis. I'm going to tell it like this: When I was incarcerated, people traded tapes and CDs all the time. Nobody never was trading 2Pac CDs. You know, when I was incarcerated, I listened to 'Pac all the time, because I missed 'Pac more than I missed my freedom. I lost my freedom, OK, but my heart was free, my mind was free, my spirit was free, and I knew one day sooner or later, I'd be free. But I'll never get 'Pac back. Not one time did we ever have an argument or a falling out. Not once. That's rare. 'Pac always wanted a big brother, and no two people can be as tight as me and him were. Fuck business, fuck 'Pac as an artist—I lost my best friend. ♦