

HEY MAMA

She's in the midst of a court case that has the LAPD on the ropes, and her new book, *Biggie*, pulls no punches either.

When it comes to defending the memory of her late son, **VOLETTA WALLACE** is one tough mother. Better watch your mouth.

INTERVIEW AMY LINDEN // IMAGES CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE







» **We first met Voletta Wallace in 1994 as she stood proudly by her son, Christopher, a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G., in his very first music video, "Juicy."**

Since then, the Jamaican-born former schoolteacher has taken on a number of roles, but none more urgent than relentless seeker of justice. It's in that capacity that Ms. Wallace filed a wrongful death suit against the city of Los Angeles in the matter of Big's still-unsolved 1997 murder. Last July, presiding judge Florence-Marie Cooper called the proceedings to a halt and declared a mistrial, stating she believed that the LAPD had deliberately suppressed evidence concerning the possible involvement of renegade cops—specifically one David Mack. (Mack, a convicted bank robber, is an alleged confidant of Death Row Records founder Suge Knight, who had world-famous beef with Biggie and Bad Boy Records' chief Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs in the 1990s.) In January, Cooper ordered the city to pay \$1.1 million to cover Wallace's legal fees. A new trial is slated for this spring.

Late last year, Ms. Wallace wrote a book, *Biggie: Voletta Wallace Remembers Her Son Christopher Wallace AKA Notorious B.I.G.* (Atria/Simon & Schuster), and served as co-executive producer of Bad Boy's latest tribute album, *Duets: The Final Chapter*. Still tirelessly defending his name, she's taken some of Biggie's closest compatriots to task over the past few months—Lil' Kim, the imprisoned rap star who has detailed her tumultuous relationship with him in interviews, and Lil' Cease, who took it upon himself to voice complaints against Puffy on the Wallace family's behalf.

Clearly, this is one woman who isn't afraid to speak her mind. Seated in a conference room at Bad Boy HQ in Manhattan, she's alternately effusive and flinty—a study in strong, motherly determination and, at times, righteous indignation. The latter most apparent around the subject of her family's complicated personal and financial relationship with Combs. XXL begins the conversation talking about the lawsuit many believe could blow the Los Angeles Police Department wide open.

Take us back to the beginning of the case. What originally led you to file suit?

This did not come out in court, but [back in the 1990s], a *Los Angeles Times* reporter said, "If you can find out this name, you'll find the murderer of your son." So here I am, a little grandmother, trying to find this name, and nobody knew who this person was. Until finally someone called and told me about this name. I called the LAPD, and the whole phone demeanor said something wasn't right. [The person I spoke with] never said, "That's not the person." So I went about my business. Then [in June 2001], I read an article and that name came up. I said, "Damn—that



name was a police officer!"

Are we talking about David Mack?

That's the name I was given.... If I tell you that a "V. Wallace" might be responsible for a murder, and you have a "V. Wallace" in your department, you're going to investigate that. So why didn't you tell me you had somebody in your department with that name? The name keeps coming up. Except for my assistant, I never told anyone the story. Then [about four years ago], I called a couple of lawyers and said, "Please check this out for me."

In a December 2005 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine, there's an article about the trial that contains this passage: "Voletta Wallace has always been reluctant to speak about Diddy in connection to the case, but when asked about police cooperation she says, 'If Puffy has been threatening people with the loss of their jobs for cooperating with the police, I want that public. If—and I'm gonna spell that capital "I", capital "F"—he did that, then I think he is lower than low."

Well, that quote. I had been told that many of Biggie's friends [had been told] that they were not supposed to talk to the police officers. And that's when I said, "If..."

We're not questioning your response.

What's troubling is the idea that someone who saw his best friend get gunned down hasn't fully cooperated with the investigation.

The police have spoken to Puffy. He was interviewed by my attorney, and he was deposed. Puffy was interviewed, to my knowledge, several times. And based on my information, the statement he made to the friends of my son was, "When you speak to the police, if you do, make sure you go with your attorney, because they can twist your words."

So you're confident that Puffy has cooperated and has advised others to do so as well.

I cannot say that, because I wasn't there. I'm one person that don't do hearsay. Now, when the [new] trial comes, he's going to be called. He's going to be testifying. Then I'll know.

When the verdict comes, if he's involved, then he's going to have to speak to Voletta Wallace. But right now, I'm not going to say he did or did not. And I hope to God, for his sake...

Do you have a formal relationship with Bad Boy?

I have a business relationship, which is considered formal. And I have a wonderful relationship with the P-man.

He doesn't come off very well in your book.

I think he comes off great. That's honest. That's Ms. Wallace.

He's not mentioned until late in the book, and there's no sense of a friendship...

Because I never had a friendship...

No, between Puff and Biggie. You say, "Christopher accepted the illusion of a friend and mentor for about \$25,000."

And, "I believe Sean loved my son—after he was dead."

Yeah.

Which sounds like he wasn't all that concerned about Biggie until Biggie died.

Well, they had a business relationship, that much I know. And after my son passed away, I saw the love. I saw the friendship. And the reason why is because I was there. Prior to that, I was not. I had no part of my son's life. It might sound negative: "He only loved my son after he died." But that's not how it is. I have

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seen the love after he died. Don't get me wrong, he can be a little pain in the you-know-where. But he can be a very, very nice guy. And this is who I got to know.

Over the years, there's been talk that says Puffy never paid Biggie as much as he should have. That had Puffy fully paid Biggie while he was alive, there wouldn't have been the need for grandiose fundraisers like the "I'll Be Missing You" single.

I honestly don't think so. What Puffy did at the time—I call it pee-pee money, the \$25,000 or whatever my son got [when he signed his deal in 1992]. If it was me, I was going to ask for a lot. But I'm not my son. After I argued and was the [pause] bitch of the century, I was told that that was the appropriate amount. Be that as it may, as a mother, I still think it was garbage. My son was doing very well when he passed away. What Puffy did after my son died, as far as that single, he did it with others from the goodness of their heart, for my son's children.

If the idea behind the single was to raise money for Big's kids, why didn't Puffy just cut the kids a check?

How the hell do you know Puffy had the money to?

Come on.

You come on! At the time, I honestly don't think that man had that amount of money to give. To me, his heart was in the right place. I'm not taking up for him—he can be a needle in the butt—but what he did? No other producer has ever done that. Think about it.

True. But Puffy is defined by Biggie, he has to keep that connection. I won't argue money, but I don't think Puffy shops at Target.

Believe me, he shops at Target [laughs]. But I know what you mean.

It's hard to believe that he couldn't just cut a check.

And give the kids \$8 million, \$10 million? I'm going to be very honest with you. You have to be realistic. Who do you know that would have done that? Think about it. Because you know what? I like hell wouldn't have done it... I loved my son very dearly, and gave my time when he died to my grandchildren. But I was not gonna cut a check and give my grandchildren \$5 million. I wasn't gonna give them \$2 million. I'm their grandmother. And you know something else? I wouldn't have let Puffy do it. I was 100 percent behind what he was doing. It was a great gesture. If he had said, I'm going to give this amount to the children, I would have said, No. Let's find another way. Because I didn't want to feel obligated. To no one, to this day. Everything I have, I earned.

But if Biggie had been compensated while he was alive...

Compensated in what way? Because, *ma'am*, every album my son made turned platinum. So naturally, the kids weren't starving.

The implication...

Is that we were here suffering? *Hell no*. Let me make it perfectly clear: I was not a pauper. I worked for 25 years. I didn't live in a one-room shack in Brooklyn. I have a masters in education, you understand? The kids were not paupers. Faith [Evans, Big's widow, and the mother of his son, CJ] has a job. Hello?! If anything, [the mothers] should go work and take care of the damn kids! Why should Puffy take care of their kids? Let me make it clear: Christopher was not a pauper. It's not a matter of if Puffy had paid him. He paid him. And even if he hadn't put out ["I'll Be Missing You"] the kids would still be perfect for the future. There's a big misconception.

In November, Lil' Cease went on Hot 97 with accusations concerning Puffy, Biggie and money. At the time, you didn't approve. You were upset. How are things between you and Cease?

Right now? I hope it's all good. Everybody needs to take care of themselves, mind their own business and leave Ms. Wallace alone. I think the problem with Cease was, bottom

line, he just needs to get on with his life and do some rapping. That was my son's protégé, but my son is not here. Cease does not know my business. So who is he to go on the radio to be taking up for me? He thought there were issues Puffy and I had that wasn't solved and Puffy had to take care of it. But it wasn't his place, and Cease apologized.



Combs and Ms. Wallace celebrate the *Duets* album release, December 20, 2005.

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How about Lil' Kim? In your book, you're unflinchingly honest about how you feel about Kim, and how she's carried your son's mantle.

That's what I hated. If you have anything negative to say, it's too late, he's not here to defend himself. You can love him. But every second you're telling the world, "I can't breathe without him." And then he's the monster who beat you. *What are you?* As a mother, I don't wanna hear that. Either you say something good or say something bad and move on! Get a life! Get on with your damn life! Leave my family alone. That's not too much to ask.

Are you upset at what she said, or that she said it after his death?

Had he been alive, that would have been their problem. He's not here, and there's two innocent children. They have to hear all that about their father.

Can there ever be closure?

I'm sure. If I see Kim right now, she looks into my face, maybe I give her a hug, wish her well. I'm not a monster, and I don't think she is either. I want to wish her well; I mean it from my heart. Kim needs to stop being a follower. She needs to be a leader and has the potential. And right now she needs some darn good counsel. ♦