From city to city, state to state, whenever The Notorious B.I.G. was ready to rock the house, the man behind the two turntables was **DJ Enuff**. Currently one of the nation's top mixmasters and often seen on BET's *106 & Park*, Biggie's amigo reveals the things he saw rolling with the rap giant.

in my LIFE

words gabriel alvarez
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VINTAGE
AIRWEAR

DJ Enuff entered the lobby of a ritzy West Hollywood hotel thinking of a master plan. His mind had been on the tour—the shows kept getting better and better—and he was ready for more. Then Rakim came through the door and messed up his concentration.

It seemed the microphone fiend was checking into the hotel at the same time Enuff was checking out. Like any true hip-hop fan, the DJ was taken aback, excited to get a glimpse of the legend in the flesh. Waiting for the rest of his entourage, Enuff took a seat on a plush couch. He kept looking over, though, keeping an eye on his hero.

Moments later, Enuff's man—the dude he'd been holding down on the wheels of steel, an MC who had recently kicked in the door of the rap game—entered the lobby.

So right there, in front of DJ Enuff's eyes, Biggie Smalls and Rakim were about to cross paths for the very first time. B-I-G-G-I-E and the R-the-A-to-the-K-I-M.

When they saw each other they both stopped in their tracks, pausing for a second to size each other up. Then they walked toward each other, Big acknowledging Ra with a nod and a look of respect, Ra returning the gesture. And just like that, without words spoken, the two icons went their separate ways.

"That's it?!" Enuff remembers his reaction. "No Way!

"But it was something that I thought was just so incredible," he says nearly 10 years later, sitting in a back room at the downtown Manhattan studios of New York's Hot 97. "Just the way they looked at each other. It's freeze-framed in my mind like, 'Look at these two great rappers.' It was that attitude of hip-hop, like the old and the new. It was crazy."

Over the next three years, of course, Enuff would watch his friend Biggie Smalls change from the grimey rhyme-slinger, who liked black Timbs and black hoodies, to a natty dapper don, who stayed Coogi down to the socks.

Enuff himself would go from being a local New York sensation to an international star. But much like his Brooklyn cohort, he never let success change him. The Heavy Hitter has always remained humble. And his story goes a little something like this:

Enuff was born Ephrem Lopez in Spanish Harlem, January 25, 1969. His parents moved the family back to their native Lower East Side when he was only six months old. For the next decade, the young boy happily soaked up the *sabor* of his energetic community.

"The Spanish food, the music, the projects," he says with a big smile, "those were the early days of park jams for me.

"It was kinda hot because this was the early '70s and my parents' friends were like, White hippies, Black radicals and Latinos. They all had jam sessions in Central Park where my dad used to play congas. So we went every Sunday and saw him play in the park and we used to roller-skate and do all that kind of stuff."

His father held down a series of city jobs that included time as a cab driver, sanitation worker and firefighter. His mother was a secretary at Con Edison for many years. (Today she clocks in at the New York Stock Exchange.)

"My parents were hard-working people," says Enuff, who has applied the same ethic to his own career. "I remember the weekends, me and my sister had chores. And music was always on in the house. All different genres of music, from Spanish music—predominantly salsa, a little bit of meringue—to Motown, lots of Marvin Gaye, a lot of soulful classics. Listening to both of those worlds—the Spanish stuff was our background, but then the soul was like our environment. And then we all started being products of our environment."

Before he hit his teenage years, Enuff's fam relocated to Flatbush, Brooklyn, and he's been representin' BK to the fullest ever since. "Brooklyn is just so diverse," he says. "So crazy, I fell in love with it."

Like so many other kids coming of age in the Big Apple in the early '80s, Enuff fell into the spell of the nascent culture of hip-hop. Breakin', doing graffiti, he went by the name Ewop Ski.

Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force's "Planet Rock" and Run-DMC's "Sucker MCs" are the two records that Enuff cites as inspiring him to do what he does

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today. An uncle who was a disco DJ sold him some Technics for cheap and from that point on, it was on.

"I just practiced for like months and months," he says. "And just tried to mimic the whole DJ thing. And honestly, it just became a hobby. Then I became a record junkie."

Playing off Jamaican slang he heard around the neighborhood ("'nuff"), he took a new moniker and started making tapes for friends. Lacking confidence in his skills, he kept his DJing at home throughout his teenage years. It wasn't until 1991 that he landed his first paid gig—at Club Negril in Times Square. "Back then it was just all about the music and the people," he says, clearly cherishing the memories. "It was no hidden agendas, no politics, just straight music. I played a little bit of house, a little bit of hip-hop, a little bit of R&B classics, breakbeats, funk. To me that was the golden era of DJing."

Kiss FM's Kool DJ Red Alert attended several functions that Enuff rocked. Impressed, the hip-hop pioneer began looking out.

"I think he respected how much respect I had for the old school," says Enuff. "It's 1991, but I'm playin' stuff from the '70s, '80s and '90s while other DJs were kinda just playin' what's hot now."

When Red's protege, Funkmaster Flex, left Kiss for Hot 97 in 1993, Red asked Enuff to be his new backup. Hosting *The Bomb Squad*, a nightly one-hour mix show, Enuff learned a whole new side of hip-hop—one that wasn't always to his liking. "I thought I knew what I was doin' when it came to radio," he says. "But I guess like everything else, hip-hop was infiltrated by big business. So there was rules and regulations that I really didn't understand. I was always taught to play what the people wanted to hear. So I played with my heart."

It was around this time that Enuff met Big. Recently signed—by young A&R exec Sean "Puffy" Combs, to the MCA-distributed Uptown Records—the Bed-Stuy MC was making more noise on the street than Mexican leaf-blowers, and he too was learning some lessons about the corporate rap world. "I knew Big when he was just signed to MCA for that one record ["Party And Bullshit"]," says Enuff. "And then he got kicked off because of the mention of Patti LaBelle on the 'Dreams' rhyme. He was real grimey: hoodied up, Timbs, jeans, just dirty lookin'. But that was the way it was. We all were. It was nothin' pretty about hip-hop back then."

"We hit every f#*kin' city. I gained 60 pounds in one summer. I smoked the best weed with Big. He was like, 'Enuff, I love California.' I said, 'Why?' [whispers] 'Because California has got the best weed.'"

As Enuff got to know Big better, he began bringing him over to the crib to record freestyles for the mixtapes he was making for underground rap merchants the Tape Kingz. Bringing to mind the infamous line, "That Brooklyn shit, we on it," the borough brothers bonded by breaking the stiff-suits' rules together.

"I got into trouble for playing Biggie's whole entire album [*Ready To Die*] on Kiss before the release date," says Enuff, of the first album to be released on Puffy's own label, Bad Boy. "Big gave me the whole entire album like, 'Yo, that's my shit, son. Let's get it poppin'.' And I was excited like, 'Hell yeah, I got you. Let's do it.' By the fifth song, I get a call on the hotline. It's Puff. He's cursing me on the phone. 'I'ma fuck you up! What the fuck are you doin'?!' I didn't understand what he was beefin' about. Big was like, 'Fuck that! Play my shit.' I continued to play it until Puff came to the radio station and tried to seize the music from me.

"I think Biggie had a lot of respect for me because I did that."

Shortly thereafter, though, Enuff lost his on-air job. Not for playing Big's album early, but because Kiss FM was bought out by the owners of Hot 97. To his surprise, Enuff discovered that the quick six months on the radio had done him a world of good. Overseas promoters started booking him off the rep he'd established. Just like that, he was rocking parties in faraway places like Switzerland, France and Japan.

Come summer 1995, back in New York, Enuff was at the New Music Seminar when he was approached by Puff. Considering past events, he didn't know what to think. He certainly wasn't expecting the mogul, now at the top of the rap game thanks to the two million copies of *Ready To Die* he'd sold, to offer him a job replacing Clark Kent (who wanted to concentrate on producing) as Biggie's tour DJ.

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STYLIST: COFFEY. GROOMER: KAL CAUTHEN. VIDEO PROVIDED BY SLIM PICKENS

would just lay back. You saw him enjoyin' life."

Out on the road with Biggie and Junior M.A.F.I.A. in '95, Enuff became an integral part of the family. His remix of the M.A.F.I.A.'s "Get Money" became the group's biggest hit, pushing past 600,000 in single sales. "Being on tour buses with them, in our underwear with the buses breaking down, seeing Lil' Kim before her boob job. I saw all those people grow up. It was history. And I don't regret any part of it. It was dope."

It wasn't all peaches and cream, though. Hip-hop was getting more attention than ever, and rap stars were living larger than life usually allows, getting wrapped up in all sorts of drama. As Biggie's star rose higher and higher, beef with a certain you-know-who started to get worse.

"That whole 'Pac shit was tough," says Enuff. "It was half and half at some places we went to. Like, 'Fuck you! We're Tupac fans!' That was tough. But at the end of the day, he loved 'Pac. I don't give a fuck what nobody says. I know he did."

In the midst of his heavy schedule, Big started work on his hugely anticipated sophomore shot, *Life After Death*. Towards the end of the 18-month recording process, he was spending a lot of time in California—a place marked "enemy turf" by that point, as the problems with Tupac had been blown into the whole crazy "East vs. West" thing. Enuff was worried.

"I had this feeling like something was gonna happen," he says. "You know when you have a feeling you shouldn't go to a certain place? I had that feeling with him, with this LA thing, and I was just like tellin' him, 'Don't go.' He had already gotten a few death threats over the phone."

Then came the tragic news. On March 9, 1997, Enuff was at home in Brooklyn when his brother-in-law woke him up and told him that Mister Cee was talking about Big on the radio.

"I'm like, 'What?!,'" Enuff remembers. "And I'm listenin' to the radio and cryin', goin' crazy all by myself. And about a half an hour later, D. Roc, Lil' Cease and Kim called me on the phone from California, from the hospital, and they tellin' me that he's dead."

In a sad and painful twist, Enuff had coproduced a song for the new album called "You're Nobody (Til Somebody Kills You)."

"Then Big gets killed and then everybody wanted to buy his albums. There were lines everywhere. And people who didn't even like him [when he was alive], all of a sudden loved him. It was crazy. So everything he said in the rhyme was fuckin' true."

Enuff was depressed for the next six months. "When Biggie died, a lot of me died," he says. "I felt like hip-hop was fuckin' wack. But then I had to realize it wasn't hip-hop. It wasn't this, it wasn't that. It was just a good friend passin'."

Enuff eased back into the rap game that summer, when he started DJing for Brooklyn rapstress Queen Pen. Then on August 31, 1998 he joined the Hot 97 *Morning Show*, replacing DJ Skribble. For the next few years, the lineup on the show was shaken up continuously—the only constant being the *Eight O'clock Traffic Jam* with DJ Enuff.

"It was no tricks to it," he says. "It was just me playin' good music—what the people wanted."

Enuff even survived the controversial antics of Star and Bucwild, who earned a quick rep for pissing people off. Star eventually made a bid to change the *Morning Show* to a Howard Stern-style talk-radio format. (Read: Get rid of Enuff.) But the Hot 97 program director wasn't having it. Enuff stayed on until 2001, when he was offered his own show on a prime time slot. But it coincided with some bad news.

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"Red Alert gets let go," he says quietly. "I looked up to him my whole career. He gave me my first shot. And I was offered to take his old job. It was ugly. I said to myself, 'If I take it, I feel like I'm disloyal. But if I don't take it, somebody else will.' So I figured I would just carry the torch and continue the legacy. It was the hardest decision I ever had to make in my career. But it was nasty, because it made it seem like I backstabbed him to get his job, when that wasn't the case."

Enuff's weekly show, *The Rush Hour*, during the coveted five o'clock slot, has exposed him to millions of listeners. He's been featured numerous times on BET, doing *Rap City* and *106 & Park* (he's featured every Friday), and he's currently the co-host of the nightly spin-off, *106 & Park: Prime*. The Heavy Hitter has parlayed such exposure all the way to Hollywood: He recently scored a cameo role (playing himself) in *The Cookout*, a Queen Latifah vehicle set to open this summer.

Even with all his current success, though, Enuff still misses his time with his friend Biggie Smalls. "Doin' the shows was the best thing in the world," he says, wistfully. "To see the stadiums, the clubs, the parties—just the reaction when he stepped on that stage. They loved him whether he was in the hoodie and jeans, or whether he had a fur coat on with gators. It didn't make a difference." ♠

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