

# I WAS THERE

WORDS SACHA JENKINS /// IMAGES BEN WATTS  
HE'S NEW-SCHOOL. THAT MEANS HE SHOPS VITAMINWATER  
AND STAYS IN BEE. BUT TO CREATE HIS NEW ALBUM,  
**50 CENT** WENT BACK TO HIS  
OLD HOUSE—HIS GRANDMA'S SPOT  
IN QUEENS. XXL WENT WITH HIM.







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**L**ow ceilings, no windows, walls plastered in promotional stickers. It's a small room in the basement of Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson's grandmother's house in Queens. And the way 50's bulked up right now—training for a role in *The Dance*, an upcoming boxing movie with Nicholas Cage—it's a surprise he fits in here at all.

'Course, 50's awfully big metaphorically, too. As in, the biggest hip-hop star on the planet. He's got the biggest portfolio, with G-Unit Records, G-Unit Clothing, G-Unit sneakers with Reebok, and a reported 10 percent stake in Glaceau Vitamin-water—the Queens-based beverage company that just sold to Coca-Cola for a cool \$4.1 billion. (Some quick math will tell you that was a big day for 50.) Now he lives in the biggest mansion in Connecticut, formerly owned by the big, big, retired heavyweight champ Mike Tyson.

Despite his size and status, the dude keeps his ear to the street and his feet in some beef. We know this. We know he got shot nine times a few years back—right outside this house, in fact. We know that his first two albums, 2003's *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* and 2005's *The Massacre*, combined to sell some 20 million copies worldwide. We know that Dipset don Cam'ron has been tryna knock his cred via Internet songs and videos and an oft-repeated cry of "Currtis!"—this in the same spirit of former G-Unit soldier The Game's G U-Not campaign.

We also know that, recently, G-Unit's sales have been slipping, along with the rest of the rap industry's, and that 50 has adopted a harder line when it comes to sponsoring his troops—except for his original soldier, Tony Yayo, whom he continues to support unconditionally, even in the face of Yayo's March arrest on charges he assaulted the 14-year-old son of The Game's manager, Jimmy Henchmen. (And we learned, a week after this interview took place, that 50's upcoming album, *Curtis*, originally scheduled for a June 26 release, won't be coming out until September.)

Damn, the big homie sure has come a long way. But as he sits down on the bed where used to rest his head, 50's more Curtis than ever.

**We're in 50's grandma's house. The very crib where it all popped off.**

We're in my grandmother's basement. I kinda grew up right here. You seen in the movie, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, I got into an altercation with my uncles, so I had to move from upstairs down here, and they converted this into a space for me. You got to bend down to walk in.

**Right. It's pretty much like a cell.**

Yeah, it is. But you know what's crazy? There's,

like, pinkish paneling under there. [Points to the sticker-covered wall] I ain't like it. So I took the stickers—promotional stickers from my first record I made with Jam Master Jay: "50 Cent Means Change." This was '97.

**There must be a thousand stickers on these walls. I mean, is this a window into how your mind works? Like, in terms of focus?**

Yeah. I'll sit there and make sure each one of them fit perfectly.

**So you were living here until when?**

2000. I got shot out front. I went and stayed in the Poconos after I got out of the hospital. It was me, my son's mom and my son. I had a place that we was staying in the Poconos. And then I came back here. Then when the record took off, I went from this space right here into a 65,000-square-foot home—Mike's house. But this is why I had to be that excessive. It had to be that big.

**What's the story behind this house?**

**How long has it been in your family?**

Prior to *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, this was the largest asset in my family. It's worth about \$250,000. Now I got cars in my yard that cost

\$400,000. My grandmother don't stay here no more. I bought her a house in Long Island. I own, like, five other houses.

**And you wrote your new album down here? Yeah. Curtis.**

**It's musty, the floor isn't finished...**

**Why did you come back here to write?**

I mean, it just brings memories back to me. I'm in my old space, see old faces, things start feeling the way they used to. Being able to write material from a perspective I couldn't probably write [from] in any other space like that. And I was in one of those funky creative spaces where I couldn't come up with nothing... For me, when I come back here, it's like my feet are on the ground. I don't think nothing is more painful than having known what it feel like to be successful and then having it taken away from you. So on some levels, it's healthy for me to go 'head and come from the financial space that I'm in back to here, as a reminder, so I can actually appreciate what I've got.

**How did it feel coming back to this house the first time after you'd been shot?**





## “YOU’LL NEVER GET THE CHANCE TO LIVE, BEING AFRAID TO DIE.”

Initially? Paranoia. It's still like—that don't ever go away. I think, after the experience, period, you a different person. I think anyone would. Even war. Like when you go to war. Even though you signed up and you can anticipate death being around you, the experience of having lived in those threatening situations, I think, can change your character.

So it makes me almost a fatalist on some levels. I accept the fact that I'm going to die, that we're all going to die. But what confuses me is, people think that when I say I'ma get rich or die tryin', they think I meant it literally. If someone you respect in the workplace tells you they going to get rich or die tryin', it simply means they're determined. That was my meaning for it at that point.

**But I think a big part of your mystique is the potential that maybe you will die.**

I will. And I'm sure that everyone else will.

**No, no, no. It's in terms of—I think fans are thinking of the likelihood of your dying a violent, hip-hop-related death.**

I mean, you're going to have random acts of violence, period. All you got to do is say to yourself, How do you actually choose to live your life? 'Cause you'll never get the chance

to live, being afraid to die. You'll never have an experience where you're actually free, 'cause you're conscious and you're afraid.

**But in hip-hop, on a certain level, it's about being accessible. And because you are who you are, it's almost impossible for you to do that.**

To be accessible. Like, when you reach a point that I'm at, when you're an international rap star, the less common you appear, the bigger your celebrity. You know, so it's a different thing. You got a guy out there that just

sold 500,000 copies that needs to be wherever the cameras is going off at, and I'm just not in that same space.

**Some of Cam'ron's jabs are about your not being in the streets with the people.**

What am I supposed to do, stand on the corner and smoke weed with him? I don't smoke weed, and I'm not standing on the corner. For what? I stood on the corner when that was my hustle. I got a new hustle and a new concept of a corner to stand on. The same idiot that you just mentioned went on *60 Minutes* and said he wouldn't tell police about [the whereabouts of] a serial killer. Only thing missing from hip-hop is an IQ test. If you're smart, you know that's not the fuckin' place to say that. Then you gotta send a statement out and apologize. What does that mean? That he *will* snitch?

**The whole “Curtis” thing. That was Cam's thing, his way of attacking you, and now you embraced it.**

I always take things people feel are uncom-



T-SHIRT AND JEANS BY G-UNIT CLOTHING, HAT BY NEW ERA, SNEAKERS BY REEBOK

**"ON SOME LEVELS, THEY'D BECOME SPOILED. AS ARTISTS. BUT THAT'S NOT THEIR FAULT. THAT'S MY FAULT."**



comfortable for me, when they aren't, and I make them comfortable. I make them not make sense to the public.

**Why would someone saying your name...**

That's another point. Like I'm telling you, you're dealing with a real idiot. He calls me the name my mother named me, to make me feel like that's a disrespect on some level. Doesn't make sense. *Curtis* is now the name of my album.

**Speaking of your next album, it seems like it's carrying a lot of weight for G-Unit. Like, you're the one who's most passionate about representing the team right now.**

It's always been like that, and it's not right. 'Cause everybody benefits on a different level. I'm not trying to throw shots at them in any way... I made a mistake. 'Cause on some levels, it comes from me coming from [where I came from]. The concept of taking care your crew is important. But I sacrificed \$8.5 million.

**For?**

On the last tour, to take everybody. Everybody was being paid.

**But didn't the tour make money?**

Listen, I gave \$8.5 million that would've went in my pocket to the artists' expenses. Bringing their entourages and bringing everybody here comfortably, that was me making a personal investment in growing the brand, G-Unit, and having them in front of my audience, allowing them to impress these people to the point that they would become fans of them also.

**Did any of them do that?**

I think on some levels they did. I think, in all due respect, both Banks and Buck put together good albums on their own this go-around. Buck's record, they embracing it in a big way. So I think he made more friends. Buck made more relationships away from 50 Cent. So

he's starting to take a shape of his own. I think that's cool. I don't care to be friends with anybody. The position I'm in, I don't think everyone is capable of being a friend to me.

**So where is Banks right now?**

Banks is actually... At home, I guess. I haven't spoken to him in a little while.

**Do you feel like the artists on G-Unit took advantage of you?**

No, they didn't take advantage. I set up something that was unrealistic. I set up a situation where I'm fueling the entire thing, and they've grown accustomed to me just being the driver. They got to drive on their own. They want the crowd to be screaming for them, instead of 50 Cent.

**I understand you had a serious meeting**

**where all of G-Unit's artists attended.**

Yep. January 3. Laze was there as representation of M.O.P., Havoc and Prodigy. Banks, Buck. Spider was on the conference, on the phone. Olivia was there. Sha Money was there. I broke it down. I told them that I wouldn't be assisting financially anymore... I pretty much was telling them I wouldn't be there. [Before then,] they'd make a lot of money and spend a lot of money and have me there to fix it. Whether I got to give them \$500,000 or \$300,000...

**You're giving them \$300,000? For what? A car? A house?**

Just 'cause they want \$300,000 more to make what they doing at the time comfortable. Like, "Yo, I want to get this new place over here."

Put it like this: When I called the meeting,



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**"IF IT KEEPS GOING THE  
WAY IT'S GOING, THERE WON'T  
BE ANOTHER 50 CENT."**

I looked around the room, and I was the only person with G-Unit sneakers on. But they were being paid. Like, while Shawn Carter was endorsing basketball players, the rappers on G-Unit were receiving checks from RBK. You see what I'm saying? So it would look like all the money was going to 50, but they was being paid to be a part of it, and they wasn't adhering to it. Like, it'd become the norm for that check to come, and they were no longer wearing, you know, the clothes. And I was like: "Well, fine. You can go get your own company." And realize that there is no real money in that deal. So on some levels, they'd become spoiled. As artists. But that's not they fault. That's my fault.

**So what's the difference with Yayo?  
It seems like he's the last one you're  
riding hard with.**

You know what? Yayo didn't adjust. To be honest with you, Yayo is exactly where he was when we was on the corner.

**Which is what?**

Tony Yayo. He just didn't make the transition. And a lot of the things that are important to the other artists aren't important to him.

**Like what? What's not important to  
Tony Yayo?**

Selling records.

**Selling records is not important to him?**

No.

**Why not?**

He just don't care. 'Cause he know he gon' be aight anyway. You understand?... Like, he comes home from jail [in 2004]. Then he goes back to jail 12 hours later. You know what the first thing to pop out his mouth is?

**What?**

"Yo, son mad?" He wants to know if I'm angry... You're outta jail. Putting chinchilla-mink coats on you, diamond watches. You're running around, two girls in the house. But by the time you—next morning, you go back to jail?! And the first question you asking is am I upset? Because as long as I'm not really mad about it, then it's okay?

**But if he was in Dipset, what would you  
be saying? If he was the leader of Dipset  
and he did stuff like that?**

I'd be saying he's an idiot.

**But since he's your man...**

He's not the leader.

**But he does shit that affects you, I mean...**

He does things that people pull me into for publicity. You see what I'm saying? To say that he does something is to say he's actual-ly guilty of doing something. And we haven't

come to that conclusion at this point. Neither us or law enforcement.

**But, still, if he's doing stupid shit.**

What is he doing that's stupid? Outside of physically being in the wrong place.

**Well, you just said that if he was in Dipset  
and he came outta jail...**

He doesn't belong being the actual leader. He knows this. He don't want to. That's the significance in him. I'm telling you, the other artists actually want to feel to be 50 Cent.

**And that's why you guys can actually get  
along, because he knows his place?**

It's not... Yeah. Yes. He knows his position and is comfortable with it because he acknowledging the accomplishment.

**But do you, at times, wish he would maybe  
not make some of the decisions he makes?**

Nah, 'cause he ain't did nothing wrong. If I seen him doing something wrong, I'd probably have to remove myself from him. But for me to not associate myself with Tony, he has to do something incredibly bad. Incredibly bad. Like, I couldn't even come up with a scenario in my head why I wouldn't...

**And the whole thing with Henchmen's son  
allegedly getting smacked?**

Come on, man, you don't even have to ask that question. Look what you talking about. Who, Killer Jimmy? Ain't Tupac say, "Pay-back for you, Henchmen, in due time/I knew you bitch niggas is listening/World is mine/Set me up, wet me up." I said Tupac said it. You need me to validate that for you? Look at what you're talking about.

**Okay. What are your expectations, sales-  
wise, for Curtis?**

My expectations are very high, still. I feel I can still sell eight million records. I plan to tour extensively. I'll be doing about two months—August and September—domestically, in the U.S., and international for probably another six months after. The project has the kind of legs that it needs, as far as the creativity and actual music.

**But if you don't hit eight million records...**

I mean, if I don't, I don't. But I feel like, at this point, the actual record sales aren't going to be a reflection of the interest I generate... The music business is going to change. It's going to be less marketing dollars. They gonna start doing single deals, because they make the money with ring tones, as opposed to doing full albums. If it keeps going the way it's going, there won't be another 50 Cent. There won't be another person that makes it, you know, where I'm from, on the same level. ♠