

## L.A. NIGHTLIFE

By Wayne "Belize" Villafranco

One night, my friends and I had just finished a full night of dancing to reggae and soca music at the club. The night was beautiful with the stars shining so brightly. We were feeling wonderful after a night of drinking and dancing. Who would have guessed a tragedy was about to happen?

After a great night at the club, my friends and I started walking home feeling joyful and talking about how lovely the night had been. Suddenly, some gangsters in a '64 Chevy wearing hoodies and black clothing called out to us: "Hey, where y'all from?" I had never seen these thugs before. We ignored them and kept on walking. But they were persistent in trying to find out where we were from. So they drove past us, turned left at the corner, stopped and called out to us a second time. This time, my friend Mad Rock, who is a gangster too, turned towards the car and got back at them fools saying, "What's up?"

I saw one of the thugs with a hard evil look in the car grab something. I knew it was a gun. I jumped on Mad Rock and both of us hit the ground. I started to run down the block. And then I heard, "BOOM BOOM!" The next thing I knew, I was lying on the ground, tripping, not knowing how I got there. My heart was beating so fast that I could feel the adrenaline rush through my veins. I got scared the gangsters were driving back toward us. I yelled out, "Run," and we all went our separate ways, as I remained lying on the sidewalk pretending to be dead. I noticed the thugs coming toward me, so I got the hell up and began to run, fearing for my life. Shots were being fired everywhere.

No thoughts entered my mind about where to go next, except how I could escape this nightmare. I ran into an open parking lot looked over my shoulder and saw that they were close behind me.

Out of a nowhere, a Cadillac appeared in front of me. I jumped over the hood, not losing any speed. I kept running, then climbed a fence in someone's backyard. The gangsters were still looking for me. I could hear them saying, "Where did that fool go?" While they were looking for me, I took off again through some houses. The people in the houses screamed. So I ran out the door in fear of my life. I ran down the street and started feeling pain in my leg. I stopped to look down and knew that I had been shot because blood was running all over my leg and pants. I crossed the freeway and got to my boy's house and knocked on the door. BAM BAM BAM. I rushed in and everyone got scared 'cause there was blood everywhere. I was scared, and two of my boys were there already and rushed me to the hospital.

While I was getting treated, the curtains were drawn in the next bed over. I could hear much drama around. I wondered what was going on.

My boys came in and checked on me. They were hot and carrying on. "We are going back at them fools." We were talking about who they were and I then I heard the doctors talking. "It's too late. He's gone." I heard the nurse say, "So young." Something inside me told me to ask, "What's going on?" The nurses looked at us, "You're lucky it wasn't you but him." One of the nurses told us that he was standing outside a dance club and was shot by drive by shooters. "Only 15 years old. His whole life is gone now."

Meanwhile, my boys were still hot, but something was telling me that retaliation was not the answer. So I yelled at the homies. "No! We're not going after those fools! Look at the youngster dead in that bed. That could've been one of us or our family man! It's just not right." They looked at me like I was crazy and muttered, "What you mean?" I said, "I'm done with all this homies, didn't you hear what the nurse said? I could've been dead! Mad Dog, listen. That youngster could've been your baby boy, dead. Why we going to get back at them cats and maybe kill someone else's son or daughter? Don't you get it? It's over! I'm through! No revenge! I don't want nothing to do with it." I felt a sense of relief.

As part of my transformation towards peace, I've learned through my trials and tribulations that I cannot go around hurting my community, my friends, family as well as myself. I found myself in and out of prison because my attitude was ungodly and destroying lives. The person that I was yesterday is not the person that I am today. I think about other's feelings and emotions before I make a decision. It's not just about me. It's also about others. Therefore I choose to walk in a positive light. I choose to stroll in the light of happiness and strut beneath the light of peace. I want to be the rock that skips across the water and causes a positive ripple effect in not only my life but the lives of others. Every action has a ripple effect, and you can choose vengeance or you can choose compassion. Today, I choose compassion.



Wayne "Belize" Villafranco as the Player Queen (far left) in Shakespeare at San Quentin's HAMLET, performed Jun 15, 2012.