

SHABAKA VALGENE BAKER

b/ 1965

Well, ever since I was small I was always a quiet person, so that always made me feel kind of left out. I grew up in the small town of Pomona. Nothing ever went on there and I was always excessively bored. I never had many friends-- one or two maybe, if I'm lucky. I didn't know too much about drinking and smoking. So all I did was watch t.v. and eat plums. Sometimes I would try something new, "sex". But all I ever did was rub butts, and that wasn't no fun. I was spoiled and got my feelings hurt easy. What was really a put down was that everyone in my family had at least one or two baby pictures except me. I would bother my mother from time to time asking her, "Why don't I have a baby picture?". All she ever showed me was a picture when I was about four years old, but that never did satisfy me. The more I bugged her, the more angry she got, so I just left it alone. Still I never forgot that when I asked to see my baby picture, she said, "Oh honey, you do have a baby picture," and pulled out that picture of me when I was four. Finally she came to me one day and explained why I had no baby picture. She said, "Well son, I was going through a lot of changes when you were born-- you understand, don't you?" "Yeah, I understand, I didn't want to see myself anyway." Well, I soon went through that era in my life, but still I was bored.

Sometimes, when I would come home from school and watch the school students walking, chatting with their friends, I would always envy the fun they had. It was hard for me because I was so quiet. All I succeeded in getting was one "stick buddy" and that was frustrating. His name was Lamont and I must have been a masochistic fool because he put me through some hell-- he and his brother Demetrius, but everyone always called him Weechie. My grandmother told me to stay away from them, but Lamont was the only so-called friend I had. I felt I couldn't leave him or I'll go back to my stagnant way of life. My grandmother said I would pay and I did.

One time I was playing at Martin Luther King Park. Me and Lamont were throwing dirt rocks. Finally we got tired and we went behind a big dirt hill. I was sitting down digging in the dirt; Lamont was standing up throwing rocks (hard rocks). I didn't pay much attention til I heard a loud yell. I jumped up as soon as Lamont ducked down. All I saw was a big, strong dude and two other guys walking to where we were. None of us said a word; he walked over and asked "Who hit me with that rock?" We both denied it. He finally said, "Alright, then I'll hit both of you then". Lamont yelled out, "He did it" pointing at me. I looked shocked and tried to deny it all I could but that did no good. He threw rocks at me hitting me in the face. Dirt went all in my mouth. I was lied on by my own friend. I thought soon after he and his gang left, Lamont looked at me nervously, smiled and said, "I really threw the rocks". My reaction was he's the only friend I have, so I just stayed with him. (When I look back I was a fool.) His brother Weechie could beat me up at the time.

Every time I would come home from kindergarten, Weechie and his friend Perry would always trap me and stick my head in the sand. After about fifteen or even thirty minutes of sand being thrown in my face and getting beat up, I finally gave up my money. Well, everyday this would go on and I would try to endure as long as I could. Finally, I got fed up; they stuffed my head in only once and I jumped like a roaring lion. I pushed Weechie off of me and started beating up on Perry. He ran away and I guess Weechie was in shock, but I got him too. I started to walk home strutting a proud strut, walking a proud walk. It was like every step I took was like walking on a street of gold. Well, I finally realized that those little cliques weren't what I thought they were. But when I came to Peoples Temple, I really found friends. I didn't expect people to like me simple because I looked down on myself too much. But when I came to the Temple I got confidence in myself-- self-pride.

I had a lot of fun at the Redwood Valley Peoples Temple. I would just feel the love and solidarity and I wanted to stay there forever. But when I got back to Pomona, it was like going on another planet. More Mexicans were moving in from Tiajuana. Blacks and Mexicans were always fighting. At first, it was the whites vs. the Blacks; now two other races were fighting. It made me sick. Then, when it seemed

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like the Mexicans were winning (and finally they did), everybody wanted to be Mexican.

I would have never come to the Temple if it weren't for Chris Lewis, my uncle, but in my heart he was my daddy. When my dad Bill Baker wasn't getting along with my mom, Barbara Baker, one day he just got in his car and drove away. I didn't see him for about three years. Well, my mom didn't own the house, she had no job and didn't know how to drive. With four young children on her hands, she didn't know how to do it on her own. When Chris and my grandmother found out, they quickly moved in and helped. Chris was a gangster then, so he gave my mom lots of money.

My grandmother took care of us and taught my mom how to drive. I disrespected my grandmom very much. I took my hostilities out on her simply because she was old. When she got sick and ready to die, I started to realize what I did-- how I disrespected her. So before she died, I just had to show that I really did love her. My granddad, I never knew him. He died of cancer before I was born. All I know is he was from Trinidad. His name was Rudolf Alexander Lewis. He was a very handsome man from the pictures and participated in many riots in New York. He and his wife and three children, Barbara, Ruthann, and Chris moved to L.A. in 1945 into my great grandmom's three story house. Inherited from my grandmom, Chris was always outstanding. Barbara loved to party. Ruthann was the kind searching for Beverly Hills and she got it too. She worked at a job that I would have hated to be at. She worked in a prison. My mom worked as a pre-school teacher. She was put through a lot of hell because of racism and she wouldn't take no shit from her fellow workers (white). It would have been easy for her to have asskissed because she was mopping and scrubbing floors before she got the job. But she didn't sell out and she got fired. She took it to court because it was a conspiracy. She didn't win but everyone in that preschool will never forget the hell she put them through. She was the best teacher and all the kids called her Teacher Baker.

Chris was a gangster and hooked on heroin til he came to Peoples Temple. When I lived with them, it was still far away from the Temple and it was hard for me coming from a loving society back to a hateful one (when I moved from Redwood Valley Peoples Temple back to Pomona). I started getting into fights and was expelled from school. Sometimes I would smoke about six packs of Winstons. I would rip off wine and beer. I just started throwing my life away. Once I was so depressed, I drank six glasses of eighty proof brandy.

I never smoked weed because I had seen what it did to my brother. He almost got killed from getting too high off Angel Dust. I got into homosexual and regular sexual relationships. I started fires and almost burned someone's house down. I broke out car windows and broke into houses. I stole out of stores almost everything that a depressed boy would steal. Then finally, my dad came back and he took us on trips. That fulfilled my life a little bit but not enough. I was looking for Peoples Temple once again which I had left two years before.

Well, I finally went back after two long years. My patterns changed overnight. I started to sing for Peoples Temple members. Once again, I had meaning to my life. My mom promised she would never leave again (the Temple). Then finally, we decided to come to Jonestown. When I got here, I was shocked. It was more beautiful than the pictures. Now I can go to Georgetown and sing. And now, I'm learning a profession. In the states, I didn't have enough money to start in on a profession. But you don't need money here. So, I grow up planning to be a singer and electrical engineer.

Oh, and by the way, my name wasn't always Shabaka. I changed it from Shawn when I saw "Roots".

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