



MY ART STORY by Nahshon D. Ratcliff

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My appreciation of nature began in the foothills of Altadena, California, where I was raised. Eventually, decorating the annual Tournament of the Roses Parade floats drew me to arts and crafts. My love for theater and beauty blossomed at John Marshall High School in Ms. Smith's drama class. Monthly visits to SONY Studios in Culver City to view my schoolmate Jaleel White—aka Steve Urkel—tape his hit TV sitcom *Family Matters* left me filled with abundant Hollywood aspirations.

At the age of 19, I was blessed with a job as a TV production assistant on the Keenan Ivory Wayans late night talk show. On my first day, I was given receptionist duties, but unbeknownst to me, I was secretly being videotaped for a comedy sketch. Since I didn't react the way the producers thought I would, I was given the option to leave or actually work the rest of the day. I stayed, believing my career was taking off.

However, that weekend while celebrating, I was duped, brutally assaulted, and left with bullet fragments in my elbow in an attempted robbery gone bad. Over the following years, flooded with insomnia, rage, and grief, I was diagnosed with PTSD. I ceased working in TV and film production. I tried my hand at acting and modeling, became successful, and joined the Screen Actors Guild.

After many years of a tumultuous lifestyle, I moved to New York, and by 2013 I began harnessing the power of writing in workshops at Project Red Umbrella, the Actors Fund of America, and the Bronx Writers Center. My competitive nature emerged once again, and I entered my 20-page manuscript, *Shooting Range*, in the Bronx Council On the Arts (BCA) Brio grant competition. A silver lining followed in 2014 when I won the \$3,000 prize for nonfiction. Ignited with passion and inspiration, I had my manuscript adapted into a screenplay. I felt a short film would be the next outlet and natural way to expand my creativity, and desired an audience to see how and what I have survived.

I believe *Shooting Range* can have a meaningful impact on survivors of violent crimes, and could open doors for dialogue on PTSD. *Shooting Range* is supported in part by the California Arts Council and the National Arts and Disability Center at the University of California Los Angeles.

My writing has left me with an immense coruscating smile in my heart and a purpose, restoring my equilibrium, hope, pride, and dignity. Due to a generous \$40,000 NEA Art Works grant, the BCA published Volume I of the Bronx Memoir Project, the first ever of its kind in the nation: a stereotype-shattering anthology of contemporary memoir fragments; an unprecedented collection penned by 50 Bronx residents (including me), spanning various generations, continents, languages, cultures, and themes.

Thankfully I was selected to hone my storytelling skills this summer at VONA/Voices, the Voices Of Our Nation annual writing workshop to develop and empower emerging writers of color, in Miami, Florida. For the duration of my life I'll remain steadfastly pushing forward, using the positive transformative powers of creativity as my therapy to entertain with artistic excellence while being a relentless advocate for the arts for those suffering from mental illness. ■



Nahshon Ratcliff and Audacia Ray, executive director of Red Umbrella Project. Photo courtesy of Nahshon Ratcliff.