

Meet the Man Who Documented Snoop Dogg Like Only a Friend Could (and How You Can View the Pictures)

When Long Beach photographer and filmmaker Duke Givens graduated in 1989 from Poly, he knew two things: he wasn't ready for college and he wanted to desperately escape the violence that pervaded his home along the 2100 block of Lime St. in the Eastside.

With little options, him and a few friends—including Calvin Broadus, known amongst his friends by the alias of Cordozar—opted to try the Air Force exam to join the military and face a different war in Iraq. Givens was the sole person of the group to pass the exam and, upon his return in 1993, he would discover that Cordozar was now known as Snoop Dogg and that his neighborhood, still plagued by violence, would soon become the focus of his creative side, thanks to a gift from his parents: a 35mm SLR Canon AE-1 camera. Initially baffled by the gift, little did he know it would become a key cog in not only his future professional endeavors but a form of expression which has altered the way Givens approaches the world day-to-day.

“I really thought they were crazy—it was like, ‘Why would you buy me a camera?’” Givens said. “I had no idea it would become a passion but after I took a class at LBCC, my first print—this shot of two young black girls—won me a contest and some confidence in my photography skills.”

That confidence came into focus with Givens opting to photograph the darker side of human life: the funerals of gunned down young men, photos of current and ex-gang members...

These images, paired with his friends that had now become Long Beach royalty and household names nationwide—Nate Dogg (Givens' cousin), Warren G (a longtime friend), and, of course, Snoop—became a calendar that sought to reduce gang violence or, in the least, open a much-needed discussion.

“That’s life in the city—this world is violent,” Givens said. “But you have to accentuate the positivity... My Dad was essential in helping me realize that: you can put something up on a wall that degrades women or you can try and do something positive, create an idea. That’s where the real peacemaking happens: ideas.”

In fact, Givens—who had never joined a gang himself—was able to witness the other side of ganghood: with many gang members lacking fathers or father figures—a key aspect in understanding the inner city struggle in Givens' eyes—there was a fierce loyalty amongst them that looked more like brotherhood than ganghood when the guns weren't drawn. In fact, Givens' father became a role model for all of Givens' friends, especially Snoop. Though the boys were required to lift up their pants while stepping inside—“He wasn't militant; he was hard-working and he simply sought respect,” Givens noted—the house was a safe haven of sorts, where Snoop's budding love of music was welcomed and cherished and encouraged.

This long-held friendship gave Givens access into the beginnings of one of rap's biggest stars as well as becoming an essential part of its history. After his father had built him a dark room in the garage to continue his journey into photography and shortly before the aforementioned Stop the Violence calendar, Snoop rolled up on Givens developing a photo of Snoop standing in front of an Impala, head cocked slightly with confidence. Fresh off the massive success of his debut album, Doggystyle, Snoop was putting the finishing touches on his second album, Murder Was the Case.

“Snoop just walked up and said, ‘There it is,’ and I was like, ‘Say what?’” Givens said. “‘That’s my next album cover.’ It was... uniquely weird. I was developing something that I wasn’t even sure where it was going.”

From a roll of negatives—the heartbreak of any photographer: now lost—that depicted Snoop’s court battle in the 90s to day-to-day existence in the 6th District of Long Beach, Givens’ philosophies—from the military showing him a respectful camaraderie that differed from the desire to kill your fellow brother to the idea that the embracing of violence due to the loss of fathers—permitted him to build a portfolio that spans both pictures and video. In fact, his collection of Snoop photos will be given a special exhibit space at MADE in Long Beach, with an opening reception on Saturday, February 20.

“Capturing history—even when that history is ugly—is a beautiful thing,” Givens said. “It provides perspective and it allows for us to channel positivity, to discover change, to have a better life.”

SN00P: The Early Years of Snoop Dogg by Duke Givens will be shown at MADE in Long Beach located at 240 Pine Ave., until the end of March. For full details, [click here](#).