

Sounds From the Street: Ron Dudley on Hip-Hop & Fatherhood

Transcribed by: Joshua Davis

[Music]

Adam Kampe. (Host): That's Ronald Dudley Aka "Pookanu?" Rapping on about Father's day from the the eponymous album. And this is sound from the street, a podcast about homelessness, and life on the margents. I'm your host Adam Kampe.

AK: When Ronald Dudley is not selling Street Sense he lives life like most people and do not identify as homelessness he cares for his kids, he pays bills, and he works. However Dudley is also a hip-hop Artist who goes by "Pookanu" on his latest album on "father's day" he contrast the pain of poverty, addiction and death with the joy of being in love and being alive. "Pookanu" is a man on a spiritual mission, a mission to make sense of life, god and fatherhood. We sat down almost one year ago to talk about his story and his music a few years ago he was spending so much time with his young daughter "**brookie**" that they started to make music together in honor of father's day we'll start with an older song that they calibrated on "Daddy's make the world go round"

[Music]

Ronald Dudley aka Pookanu: we were looking through beats and she was just running around I had it planned I had the beat planned [imitates music notes] - [Music again]

RD: Then I added the part dear mama because the reason why I said dear mama because it was like um.. y'know like tupac had a song like dear mama like your being subluminal but fun at the same time. Daddy's make the world go round don't forget dear mama, it's like this is a song to you mama

[Music]

Dear mama I love my dad, cause y'know sometimes as father's we don't get the love that we need

[Music]

AK: So where does the name pookanu come from?

RD: My grandmother uh yea my grandmother gave me that name when I was a baby so yea people be like - a lot of people think it's hawaiiin or...it's just a name my grandmother gave me. And it stuck with me tried to make up some many different rap names but it has always stuck with me.

AK: It's good!

RD: Yeah so..

AK: And also it's kind of fun to say it

RD: Right right right..I love the name now but growing up it was different. you in school and "Pookanu!" Once somebody found out that's your name it was like [**chuckle**] but Now once I really came back too

the city and really- that's when I really realized what my name was really for y'know?. Y'know my grandmother gave it to me and..it just stuck with me.

AK: So you rap? And you've been doing that for quite some time? Take me back to so like.. The day that you first remember like falling in love with Hip-hop or rap was there a moment that you remember like oh sh- oh I really want to do that or song that just got stuck in your head and your like.. "Ookay."

RD: Yeah man um - **[Music]** it was an open mic night and I went like a week before and I lost I was by myself the guy was going against me with a group of people so I learn that's what made him sound better y'know what I mean?. But I didn't get mad and I went home and I just practiced all week for this open mic and it was just practice, practice, practice, **[Chuckle]** practice. Practice. And when I went to open mic the DJ I think he didn't like me for no reason y'know you don't need a reason for people not to like you that's what I've learned but that day he put a beat on that I practiced all week on and when it got to me I killed the beat like literally killed it because it was the same beat that I practiced with all week. So it amazed me and I was like Man.. No he didn't but he was really trying to mess me up, throw me off but I was just in the zone all I know is that I was on a stage and I Caught the beat like a wave I surfed the hole beat. And when I finished it was like.. I was like a bubble that was my moment that was MY moment to come back to open mic and literally win.

AK: do you remember the beat?

RD: Nah I just know it was just a Jamaican beat cause I was at a Jamaican club and they had open mic

[Music]

AK: Is that your first experience competing?

RD: That was my first experience competing cause y'know you free style against people that free style and you realize that people not really free styling they saying stuff that they written but they are artist it's fun I just love the battle scenes but the battle scene let me know that I was nothing because there are people out there that there's so many dimensions to rap and hip-hop so that's why I like to battle it lets me know that you've got a lot of work to do but y'know what I'm saying?

AK: Yeah yeah

RD: So it was fun like I tell people you just having 10 to 15 people on Ustreet outside battling for 4 and 5 hours and we would battle all night. We had the radio and the batteries were so expensive y'know what I mean? But we still did it until the day we had to stop. DC had some of the most talented people on the planet and if you were not careful you were to run into some of them.

AK: Some people like.. Oh yeah I was like five years old and I herd y'know sliding family stone or I herd some artist that made you want to do this?

RD: Yeah see I was young I always tell people "pump it up" **[radio like voice shouts pump it up]** I was just being a kid and the show pump it up would come on. **[Pump it up theme plays]** you had the jukebox then you had "Joe Claire" like people don't know he's from D.C and he had rap city when it first came out. So he just listening to people it's like Chaos won, Public enemy, I tell people even rick James, Michael Jackson um.

AK: African banbaataa

RD: African Banbaataa everybody on the whole east coast [gramaer ascaflash?..wha?] everybody they

started the whole hip-hop thing y'know what I mean they started it and like I said any chance I got to see it on tv I would watch it. But like growing up I really couldn't listen to music and watch tv and stuff like that so I had to get it how I could get it anywhere I could get weather its stealing to gets some batteries or go in the bathroom or in a barn whatever with a walk man however I could listen to music I could listen to it when nobody was there cause like I said the east coast to me that's what we follow besides gogo it's just like wherever you herd that's what you played And that's what you listen to. And y'know I just like to listen to music period I didn't care where it came from.

AK: And you also not only do you rap but you produce right? are you.. You put beats together and
RD: I can feel music a lot like I wrote songs to tracks and then I herd somebody else and then we wrote about the same thing. Y'know everybody can't do that. And me more of a song person y'know what I mean? Somebody can just rap or free style but I might write a verse and then write the next verse next year. People be like how you gonna make money? And then they let you know that it's not for the money like these last 6 months I haven't been to street sense I've been frighten I wrote a whole album and I tell people it's better than anything I've ever wrote. **[Music]**

AK: do you keep like a little notepad with you? At all times? Coming up with lyrics or ideas?

RD: On my phone but I can remember stuff quick better than the average person that's what people don't know like I can remember like they say I don't even know how I know all of these songs I haven't recorded them yet. Mama you're a miracle and the reason why I'm spirtual you too me to church to be a better individual you took me to god to keep me from the devil hand you told me to pray, pray to be a better man and you gave me the will power to be strong you told me to fight the demons until the devil gone you gave me the mind **[Fade in Music]**

AK: just to pause the music stuff for a second will come back to it but I think this is related this is like.. Maybe the most personal question I'll ask and you don't have to talk about anything personal if you don't want to but were here at Street Sense when and how did you find yourself struggling with Homelessness?.

RD: Bad rental agreement, bad situation man like..

AK: The bad situation is he and his little girls and the woman he was with were scammed out of their apartment by a shadey landlord

RD: we got through like 6 months and the lady just.. Started when we wasn't there she started coming in robbing us while we were at work taking my computers it's month 5 and I'm getting dressed there's police and security just coming in they want me to move because the landlord said this.. y'know just coming in making up all kinds of stuff and I just had to sell everything people were saying put it in storage...for what? **[Chuckle]** it's 100 degrees I just lost everything I got two daughters and a son on the way so I'm not in the line life of begging from people I'm the man I've always been a man had my own space y'know what I mean so I didn't know what to do I just had all my income tax came just brought a bed ,tv just I was so prepared I wasn't thinking this was going to happen so and I did everything to try to fix the problem everything just starting and I'm like "where am I gonna go where am I gonna go?" So my son's mom she had mom back to the hood but that's why I just left I'm going backwards now.

AK: And to make matters worse he was dating a addicted and she was pregnant with his then unborn son ricardo

RD: and I think I met the wrong female y'know what I mean and I don't talk about it yet but she had a habit - pills. Perks and Oxies just.. not the average I'm talking about the Hollywood habit. Y'know what I mean just.. yes so that stressed me out too because we were supposed to be doing so good I had got her a job with me we got the apartment it was in November so December came like once I moved into the apartment I thought things would be great but instead they started getting worse and it wasn't on my behalf cause I was doing the righteous thing and I'm Still trying to do the righteous thing no matter what for my son's mom's habit. Stealing from me in front of my daughter and she just never saw that and this is Christmas eve and your taking money on Christmas eve so it just got so crazy like.. And I'm like this is December by June we was out and like her addiction was so bad I felt like I was addicted because I'm going to strange places strange people just knocking at the door so now I'm like damn she's pregnant, she's a liar and a thief what am I going to do I have to get through this. So I said okay I ended up with her mother so now I'm still homeless.

AK: And how long ago-

RD: This happen 2 years ago cause my son will be 2 in October so I guess each time I tried to better myself I ended up.. Because a person not coming through with their end of the stick so like the last 3 years that she sold her food stamps who do you think pays for the food?. I can't get this back but she's still taking pills so we can never talk because your still lying getting rehab 7 days a week. Just like y'know what I mean how many hours that is away from your child? And your still taking the drugs that got you addicted to heroin. You're kidding yourself you're not going to kid me this time. **[Music hip-hop]** that was one of my latest like I said my son was born um I was just going through what fathers go through y'know what I'm saying? At that time I was going through a lot but the song came out good and I think that was like one of the last songs I recorded.

AK: what's your goal for the future, what's your dream scenario?

RD: Oh man.. I just want to be the world's greatest podcast man.. -physic nah! **[laughter and chuckle]** my biggest dream is just being around for my kids man just being alive y'know what I mean I'm cool with life I just want to be able to have a place to sick my key in the door again so I can be more focused and y'know cause that's more than music to me I tell people.. Like if it was music career or an apartment or a place for my kids and me I would pick that. **[Music]**

AK: that was Ronald Dudley AKA Pookanu on his life and his music you can download his new album "father's day" at pookanu.cominstore.cdbay.com and soon the title track will be available on iTunes, Spotify and Amazon among other major platforms. In one click you can support pookanu and support Art also you gotta check out his cover story in this week's copy of Street sense some unreal images courtesy of choice photography. To learn more about Street sense the non-profit media center dedicated to creating economic opportunity's for people experiencing homelessness go to Streetsense.org. To hear more sounds on Street find us on SoundCloud, sticher, or iTunes. You can also stream the show on the Street sense Site Streetsense.org/audio Please keep the conversations going on Facebook and Twitter and Streetsense D.C. and at pookanu D.C. Happy Father's day yall.

[Music]

