

THE JOURNEY OF LESRA MARTIN

24-827

TRANSCRIPT

FINAL VERSION

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10:00:08

Lesra Martin This is my man Blair. How you doing' man? All right.

10:00:10

Blair I'm chill, I'm chill.

10:00:12

Lesra Martin All right, all right, all right. This used to be my street.

10:00:14

Blair Uh huh

10:00:15

Lesra Martin This used to be the street where I hung out.

10:00:17

Blair No doubt.

10:00:18

Lesra Martin My whole family used to live on this street. Number
261 Linden.

10:00:35

Narrator When he last lived on these New York streets, Lesra
Martin was a malnourished fifteen-year-old, illiterate,
and probably doomed.

10:00:49

Narrator Then fate intervened. The boy who brought justice to
boxer Hurricane Carter escaped from the ghetto onto
the world stage.

10:01:11

Narrator But Lesra Martin's salvation came at a price.

The National Film Board of Canada

presents

The Journey of Lesra Martin

10:01:31

Lesra Martin It's quite ironic for me to find myself back here in my hometown a stone's throw away from my old neighbourhood talking about the importance of education and the importance of eradicating illiteracy, not just in the Third World but in the First World.

10:01:48

Narrator His mother named him for Ezra the Prophet and Lazarus who rose from the dead. Maybe she had a premonition.

10:02:07

Narrator Lesra was the second boy in a family of eight – five boys, three girls. They were once a family on the rise but after his father, a singer, was injured, the Martins surrendered to poverty.

10:02:28

Narrator His mother Alma knew the statistics. In the ghetto, girls sometimes make it, boys usually don't.

10:02:46

Narrator Alma's favourite saying was, "The Lord works in mysterious ways." Lesra Martin met a group of white Canadians who would change his life forever.

10:03:01

Terry Swinton We were there to do some research on a fuel-saving device for our car and we had to have it tested very officially, so we went to the nearest Environmental Protection Agency Lab which was in Brooklyn, and we literally bumped into Lesra who was working there as part of a "summer job, make work for inner city youth" kind of program.

10:03:23

Lesra Martin And it just so happened that I took to these group of strangers, foreigners really who I only recently had discovered that they were from Canada, and as soon as I found that out, I would tease them all the time

because it made some sense to me that they weren't like Americans, they had a strange accent.

10:03:43

Lesra Martin

And they always smiled all the time and every time they would come into my path I would say, "There go Canada."

10:03:51

Terry Swinton

We drove Lesra from this laboratory where we were doing the research back to his apartment. And it was an amazing experience. Everybody's heard of the ghetto you know and that there are pockets of poverty and that but what shocked us, the devastation of the ghetto. I mean, literally it looked like a bombed-out war zone.

10:04:20

Terry Swinton

His home life was very chaotic; his parents drank; there was very little that was peaceful about being at home.

10:04:31

Narrator

That Lesra's spirit survived amazed them. The Canadians came up with a plan.

10:04:38

Terry Swinton

Why don't we bring Lesra up for a weekend? You know, Carabana's coming; it's such a fabulous time in Toronto.

10:04:47

Lesra Martin

I didn't even know really where Canada was. I'd never seen a map before but I went on the venture just as the Canadians told me to.

10:05:00

Narrator In Toronto, for the first time, Lesra saw a world outside the ghetto.

10:05:09

Lesra Martin Sam and Terry and Lisa had picked me up at the airport and we began to roll down the street. And Terry began to joke that they lived actually in the Casa Loma just down the street from here, and man did I ever freak. I was thinking, “Oh my God! I’m going to be living in a castle.” And then they continued on down the street, down to the end of this cul-de-sac and indicated that really, they lived here.

10:05:38

Lesra Martin I went to bed the first night and I was up almost the entire night because I kept seeing these weird shadows moving behind the curtain. And I was on the second floor of the house, and I was thinking, “Well how is that possible? Who is out there?” And I kept thinking, “Well maybe someone’s on the roof.”

10:05:58

Narrator Lesra lay awake for many nights terrified of the silhouettes. Where he grew up there were no trees.

10:06:09

Sam Chaiton I mean, we really almost instantly bonded with him I think,

10:06:14

Terry Swinton Yeah, that’s true.

10:06:15

Sam Chaiton As being part of the family, that it was just a really natural kind of extension that the idea would come up, you know, “What about studying here Lesra? What about you know, maybe we can tutor you at home?” ‘Cause we were doing that for Marty – Lisa’s son, one

of the kids that was living in the house with us; was the same age as Lesra.

10:06:37

Sam Chaiton

It wasn't totally out of the blue that we came up with that idea. We asked Lesra you know, was he interested in such a thing and he just jumped at the chance. And we said, "Okay well, obviously we have to talk to your parents about that."

10:06:52

Loriel Martin

My father had a tough with letting Lesra go as well as my mother did. They talked about it and they reasoned and they rationalized why they should and why they shouldn't, you know, saying, "Well we don't really know these people. They can take him somewhere and then kill him." And then, "What do they want him for?"

10:07:09

Loriel Martin

You know, all those things. And then they had to toss around the good parts as well. "Well if he goes to college, he can make something of himself and get away from all this stuff going on around him."

10:07:19

Lesra Martin

It was a difficult decision for my Mom. She literally, she couldn't make it. She hopped up where she was sitting on the couch and from her seat and she went into the kitchen and she immediately said, you know, as she was walking away, "I can't make that decision. I can't make it." "Earl," my father, "you have to make that decision."

10:07:38

Loriel Martin

So ultimately when he voiced what decision was made, I'm sure it had to cut through his heart like a knife because he had confirmed that they were letting their child go.

10:07:55

Narrator

Alma pinned her hopes on Lesra and gave him her blessing. He spent his last night worried about leaving his younger brothers to the streets. Then, the next morning, he was bound for a new life in a foreign land.

10:08:30

Narrator

Lesra's new family were young and zealous entrepreneurs living communally.

10:08:38

Sam Chaiton

I remember the first day we actually sat down and started to do some work. I gave him a booklet to read out loud and he started reading and just stumbled across all these words. And then started making them up.

10:08:58

Lesra Martin

I had always wanted to be a lawyer. I had hopes and dreams and aspirations of certainly graduating high school and not taking a break; going right on and going to university. And yet I had no idea that my education was as bad as it was.

10:09:22

Terry Swinton

He had just finished Grade Ten; he stood third in his class; there was forty-some-odd students in his class, and so; you know, and he went to school every day and he was proud to be going to school and you know, diligent about it. And so it came as an incredible shock to us as we got to know him better, to, just to see how, how meager his education was. I mean, he was virtually illiterate.

10:09:52

Lesra Martin

I became pretty despondent for a while as a person. I somehow began to believe that I was stupid and inferior and incapable of doing anything, even incapable of doing the simplest things.

10:10:08

Terry Swinton

As part of his education, it was, we thought it was really paramount that Lesra be connected to the history of his own community, of the black community in the United States, having a sense of self-esteem, and a secure kind of sense of one's self in the world. You have to know that stuff.

10:10:31

Lesra Martin

They began to simply surround me with books and surround me with reading material; never forcing me or saying, "you have to read this" but just surrounding me with it so that I was becoming slowly less afraid of it. So they would take me to bookstores all the time, and book sales, and libraries and so forth.

10:10:51

Narrator

A book in a library discard bin found Lesra. It was the best twenty-five cent investment he ever made.

10:11:08

Narrator

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter was at the peak of his boxing career when he was imprisoned for a triple murder he did not commit.

10:11:29

Narrator

The unsuccessful efforts of celebrities like Mohammed Ali and Bob Dylan to free him were long forgotten.

10:11:41

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter I was writing my autobiography, "The Sixteenth Round", hoping upon hope that I could take this book, my story, and throw it out over those forty-foot prison walls, out into the ocean of life like a letter in a bobbing bottle. And hoping upon hope that somebody, somewhere, someday, would see this bobbing bottle in the ocean, pick it up, open it up, read my message, and come to help me.

10:12:12

Narrator Fate dropped Rubin's message in Lesra's hands.
Inspired by Rubin's toughness, Lesra was about to discover the power of words.

10:12:24

Young Lesra Martin "Dear Mr. Hurricane Carter. It is hard at the best of times for black people to be open with each other because where we come from, we learn to be tough when we learn to walk."

10:12:36

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter That letter, my eyes kept falling on that letter and when I opened it up and read that letter, it caused me to act. It was just Lesra himself, just Lesra, not his conditioning, not his conditions, nothing – just Lesra himself. The niceness of him. The happiness of him; the intelligence that I saw.

10:13:03

Sam Chaiton Lesra was going home for Christmas to visit his parents in New York and it was just a forty-five minute train ride to go down to Trenton, New Jersey. Lesra had no concept at that time about sort of freely getting around in the world. His life at home in Brooklyn was really circumscribed in sort of three-square blocks that he felt very comfortable in.

10:13:26

Sam Chaiton He was reluctant to go there at first but we really encouraged it and we thought it would be just a fantastic experience for him.

10:13:36

Narrator Lesra accepted the challenge and entered what seemed to him to be the gates of hell.

10:13:45

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter The courts had decreed that contact visits were the prisoners' rights, then they took those contact visits and put them in the Death House. You know where, at that time, a hundred and fifty-six people had been executed and their souls still fluttering around in that Death House. I refused to go in there until Lesra came.

10:14:17

Lesra Martin After all the people would come to visit others had found their visitors, I was the only person left standing. And I was so scared that I couldn't move.

10:14:27

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter I never saw Lesra and Lesra didn't know what I looked like, and so everybody else paired off and partied up and we, Lesra and I was the only two left standing there, so I said, "Are you Lesra?" "Yeah," you know. Yeah, and it was a wonderful time.

10:14:49

Narrator This unlikely alliance between Lesra, Rubin and the Canadians breathed new life into the fight for Rubin's freedom.

10:15:08

Narrator Finally, eight years after Lesra met Rubin, the battle was over. Rubin Carter was exonerated twenty-two years after his arrest.

10:15:25

Sam Chaiton It really was almost a magical kind of event where the energy was just so right for everything in terms of, you know these fantastic coincidences that kept happening, like the way we met Lesra; and then the finding of Rubin Carter's book, and then meeting Rubin, and then...

10:15:47

Lesra Martin I think that Rubin and the Canadians and me to some extent, they all came together for a particular time for a particular purpose.

10:15:59

Narrator Moving to Toronto to live with the Canadians, Rubin launched a successful career as an inspirational speaker. The Hurricane rebuilt his life.

10:16:13

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter You can win!

10:16:15

Narrator Lesra soared as a scholar.

10:16:21

Narrator The miracles had been rendered.

10:16:34

Toronto, Canada

10:16:38

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter You're putting all the snow in the house!

10:16:40

Lesra Martin Yeah well, you know, that's, I haven't changed. How you doing?

10:14:43

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter How you doing there?

10:14:44

Lesra Martin I'm good.

10:14:44

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter How you doing?

10:16:46

Lesra Martin Very good.

10:16:47

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter Let me close this door.

10:16:48

Lesra Martin It's a relationship which is not without its ups and downs. He's gone through an incredible amount in his life and he's been used to the solitude that he had in prison, and sometimes I can't pretend to understand it all but sometimes he seems to want some solitude and wants some space and you know, want to be the master of his own ship. That's cool – I respect that of him.

10:17:15

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter Take those old shoes off there man.

10:17:17

Lesra Martin I'm going to take these off, yeah?

10:17:18

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter Yeah, take them off. Take 'em off.

10:17:20

Lesra Martin You just don't want me to mark up your floors.

10:17:22

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter That's right. Not unless you're willing to get down there and shine it again.

10:17:26

Lesra Martin Like a little kid, that's right.

10:17:28

Narrator Like father and son, each has tested the other.

10:17:33

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter And he just brung it on me, "Pop, I'm going back to law school." I said, "Well, great man, you know it's a good thing to do." "Ah, well," he said, "I'm going back to

Halifax.” Well, that means that he was leaving. That meant he had to leave Toronto – I didn’t like that.

10:17:50

Halifax, Canada

Narrator

But Lesra had a feeling, it was time. When he met his future wife, he understood.

10:17:59

Cheryl Martin

Between our conversation, he was telling me about his difficulties reading and trying to get to it but then he handed me these two books and he said, “Look I have a couple of books that I, that I think you’ll be interested in.” And so I flipped through these books and I see Lesra as a young person in these books.

10:18:18

Cheryl Martin

And I’m reading and I see his name on the back of the book and I’m thinking, “What’s he doing in this book?” I, you know, six weeks later, he says to me, he has to go do this speech at a junior high school in Dartmouth. “Come with me,” he says. So this video starts rolling and it’s the Fifth Estate old footage of Lesra’s story.

10:18:37

Cheryl Martin

And I’m sitting there and I’m watching this video and I’m thinking, “I know this story – I know this.” And at some point – I’d say within the first fifteen minutes of this video – it hit me like a sledgehammer who Lesra was and what he was all about.

10:19:04

Narrator

They moved as far as they could from Lesra’s past. He needed to be free from his destiny. But this new life in a quiet place would take some getting used to.

10:19:23

Cheryl Martin Not only did we not have, no black faces, there were, you know, no real big numbers of mixed people of colour.

10:19:35

Cheryl Martin At the same time, we didn't have that level of, that negative energy toward people of colour that is constant in the Maritimes and in Toronto.

10:19:45

Cheryl Martin A ha, ha, ha. You're so funny.

10:19:53

Narrator Working as a Crown Prosecutor, Lesra had fulfilled his childhood dream of becoming a lawyer but destiny wasn't finished with him yet.

10:20:03

Male Voice The Oscar nominations came out yesterday and Denzel Washington was nominated for the movie, "The Hurricane" for playing Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, and we are having one of the gentlemen that played a key role in the making of the movie and also the freeing of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter. His name is Lesra Martin.

10:20:22

Narrator "The Hurricane" was a Hollywood blockbuster that shone the spotlight on Lesra once again.

10:20:31

Lesra Martin The Kamloops premiere of "The Hurricane" was a fantastic affair. Even to this day, people still talking about it.

10:20:41

Cheryl Martin The young man who played Lesra's role also flew up from L.A. for the premiere and we were able to secure a

theatre downtown and do the marquee and had the limos and...

10:20:56

Cheryl Foggo

Lesra, how are you feeling tonight?

10:20:57

Lesra Martin

Awesome, I tell you this is just stupendous.

10:21:01

Narrator

The demand for Lesra to tell his story was overwhelming. Oprah Winfrey and Larry King introduced him to the world. In New York, the United Nations called on him to address the General Assembly. Lesra couldn't say no.

10:21:24

Lesra Martin

My wife and I decided that we were going to hide and hide in a small community on the West Coast. Lo and behold! The movie came out and shattered that, and so we had to make some decisions in our lives about what we were going to do with this new notoriety so to speak.

10:21:48

Cheryl Martin

My life was very private and I always considered myself a very private person. And now our life is anything but private. But, you know, I don't know that it scares us so much that we wouldn't do it or we would stop it. I think the bigger picture is that Lesra has a message. Lesra's background, everything that he's come through has to be told.

10:22:22

Narrator

Instead of wanting to be released from his destiny, Lesra embraced it. The two successful lawyers quit their jobs and joined the speakers' circuit.

10:22:34

Jill Krop

The moment we've all been waiting for. You know, often when you meet people in the course of business, you don't really know what they've been through to get to that point, you have no idea what kind of challenges they have faced, specifically if they're not obvious challenges. And I think our guest speaker tonight is a very good example of that. Lesra Martin.

10:22:52

Lesra Martin

I'm certain that at the age of fifteen, unable to read or write a single word of standard English, that today I would find myself speaking on a stage professionally. And I'm certain that I could never have imagined that I would find myself speaking in a courtroom.

10:23:19

Lesra Martin

There's a story about the power in each of us to achieve the seemingly impossible in life. It's a story about the power to turn failure itself into success.

10:23:33

Lesra Martin

Okay, I understand that you are the video guy.

10:23:36

Lesra Martin

No, I'm going to Baltimore but Toronto, then Baltimore.

10:23:39

Man at counter

Okay.

10:23:41

Staten Island, New York

Singing in church

10:23:55

Lesra Martin

I don't care if you're black, if you're white, if you're yellow, you're red, you're green or you're purple, it

makes no difference to me. There is no reason why a mother, a citizen of the world's mightiest nation should ever have to give up a child to give that child a chance at a proper education.

10:24:13

Lesra Martin It's a challenge but I love it.

10:24:15

Man with moustache It's for an employee of our company.

10:24:16

Lesra Martin Okey dokey.

10:24:17

Man with moustache That would be fantastic.

10:24:230

Narrator By sharing his story, Lesra shatters myths about race, equity and ghetto life.

10:24:27

Boy with headband I liked the movie, "The Hurricane".

10:24:28

Lesra Martin Did you?

10:24:36

Lesra Martin There were times you know when I thought I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, you know that old expression, "you could see the light at the end of the tunnel"? Man, I would be huffing and puffing and chugging along thinking I was doing just fine. And then, out of nowhere, I would look behind me and I would see my old friend Mr. Self-doubt himself gaining on me.

10:24:58

Lesra Martin "I can do this, I can survive this. I can overcome this obstacle in my life. I can make a difference in life and I certainly can make a contribution." I will never forget

the day that my Tenth Grade teacher, Mrs. Franklin, called each and every student up to the front of the room. And she asked us to indicate to the class what it was that we hoped to be when we grew up.

10:25:20

Lesra Martin

When it came to my turn, I loudly, and I proudly stuck my hand up, and I stood in the front of that room and I said, "I want to be a lawyer." Mrs. Franklin was sitting off to my right and she began to whisper in my ear. And she said to me, "Lesra, Lesra, learn to be more realistic," she said. "Learn to do something with your hands."

10:25:44

Lesra Martin

... when your mind starts getting in your way. Always let the story of Lesra and the Hurricane remind you that in each of you there is the power of one, the power in life to make a full-out commitment.

10:26:02

Lesra Martin

I still, to this very day, have to fight and grapple with this inner voice that comes out every now and then and says, "Lesra, you know, this is a sham. You know, who're you fooling?"

10:26:20

Cheryl Foggo?

So I want to, sort of want to

10:26:21

Cheryl Martin

Yeah

10:26:22

Cheryl Foggo

Back to back.

10:26:24

Cheryl Foggo

Like that. Let me just take...okay...but a little bit more... you don't mind me switching you around?

10:26:28

Lesra Martin No, go ahead.

10:26:30

Cheryl Foggo Then also, but looking at me as you're back to
back...so.

10:26:33

Cheryl Martin Lesra's keynote speaker's page, I have some more, I
want to update it.

10:26:42

Cheryl Martin The place where we are now with our lives, to me it
sometimes feels that it doesn't belong to Lesra; it
doesn't belong to me either; that he's become so well
known that you know, the world at large owns him and
wants a piece of him.

10:27:08

Narrator But Lesra's success has taken a toll. He's still haunted
by regrets for the family he left behind.

10:27:27

Lesra Martin For years, even back when I first started going home
from Toronto, I found that transition very difficult. It was
too abrupt. The train ride would take about twelve
hours whereas the plane was an hour and ten minutes.
And it was just too fast because I'd be going from one
world, in many instances a purely white world in
Toronto with beautiful, luxurious homes and everything,
to a completely black world. And the transition was just
so stark...

10:28:12

Narrator He was the chosen one. The blessings that had been
bestowed upon him gradually built a wall between
Lesra and his brothers.

10:28:24

Earl Jr. "Fru"

10:28:27

Elston

10:28:31

Leland

10:28:34

Damon

10:28:39

Narrator

A family crisis has Lesra back in New York. His brother Fru is losing his battle with AIDS.

10:28:50

Lesra Martin

Cheryl and I were talking last night and she's thinking, you know she's never met Fru, and so she's thinking that, she will be here for me and for you when we come out but she would not go in.

10:29:05

Loriel Martin

I knew that you were coming and I sort of relaxed a little bit you know, knowing that if I needed or wanted to break down, you guys were gonna to finally be here and it was going to be okay.

10:29:15

Lesra Martin

Sure, sure.

10:29:16

Cheryl Martin

Okay

10:29:17

Loriel Martin

You know that we could kind of walk through this thing together, and..

10:29:21

Lesra Martin

All right. Let's just do it. We'll do it now, we're doing it.

10:29:23

Cheryl Martin

I don't think we need to say anymore.

10:29:26

Narrator Fru's real name was Earl Junior. He was a young teen when he joined a gang and took the street name, "Fru-Quan".

10:29:37

Lesra Martin I don't think I would have liked to have been in his shoes as the oldest male. He had the responsibility in many respects of taking care of the family. Fru was playing pool one day in Brooklyn and ended up beating all the people in the pool hall. And as he went to leave, he knew that he was going to be jumped.

10:29:58

Lesra Martin A bunch of guys came out and took all of his, his sneakers, his clothes, his hat. And it just so happened that the hat they took was one of the hats that I had sent down for my younger brother Leland.

10:30:13

Lesra Martin And so of all the items that Fru wanted back, apparently he wanted in particular, the hat back and ended up having a scuffle, a fight. And in the process, the fight just got out of hand and the guy ended up dying.

10:30:33

Narrator Fru was convicted of manslaughter and got five to fifteen years. In prison, AIDS is a fact of life.

10:31:56

"Aunt Pearl" Oh yeah, we'll make it. We're strong, strong family you know. We stick together through thick and thin.

10:32:02

Lesra Martin Thick and thin. She didn't want to tell us that when she was on the phone with them, that he had actually already passed because she thought then that we might get in an accident because we'd be so upset.

10:32:18

Lesra Martin You getting out that side Aunt Pearl? All right. All right.
Now we're going across the street the other way, Gran.

10:32:26

"Granny" Huh?

10:32:27

Lesra Martin We're going to cross the street this way.

10:32:28

"Granny" Oh. Okay.

10:32:41

Lesra Martin My goodness, Granny you're too much.

10:32:45

"Granny" That guy at the back laughing at me.

10:32:47

Lesra Martin Just watch that step there Gran.

10:32:49

"Granny" I will. Uh hmm.

10:32:50

Lesra Martin Let's see who's in the house now. This is my wife
Cheryl.

10:32:55

"Granny" How are you darling?

10:32:56

Cheryl Martin How are you? Mmm it's so good to see you.

10:32:59

"Granny" Nice to see you too.

10:33:01

Cheryl Martin I've been waiting to see you! It's been five years. Do you remember? Yeah?

10:33:03

Lesra Martin You know it's been five...

10:33:05

"Granny" It's been quite a while.

10:33:07

Lesra Martin I miss the camaraderie I think; the love and attention; the soul food, you know, the closeness that you can only get from family and friends that you grew up with for your entire life.

10:33:26

Lesra Martin The first time I came home after being in Canada for about three months, I came home and you said to me, "You're not Lesra." Remember that?

10:33:33

Leland Martin Uh hmm

10:33:34

Lesra Martin You wouldn't talk to me; you wouldn't hug me; you wouldn't do anything. And, 'cause you didn't believe it was me. And you said, "You don't look like my brother; you don't dress like my brother; you don't talk like my brother." Remember that?

10:33:45

Leland Martin Yeah.

10:33:46

Lesra Martin And so I ended up saying to him, "Well what if I told you something that only you and I would actually know?" 'cause we spent a lot of time together. And he said, "Like what?" And I says, "Well what if I told you I had a

scar on my arm and I'll tell you exactly what happened,
how I got it and what you did to that scar?"

10:34:05

Lesra Martin And I showed you the scar...

10:34:06

Leland Martin Yeah!

10:34:07

Lesra Martin And that's when you believed it was me.

10:34:08

Leland Martin Yeah.

10:34:09

Lesra Martin Is that right?

10:34:10

Leland Martin Yeah

10:34:11

Lesra Martin Uh hmm. And then you hugged me for the first time –
I'd been home for hours. That's how close we were.

10:34:16

Leland Martin Yeah I know. I know. I miss that too, you know what
I'm saying? I always remember the time that I came up
to Canada with you and we went to the park and we
seen the ducks in the pond.

10:34:27

Lesra Martin Yeah

10:34:28

Leland Martin You know what I'm saying? We had a nice time when I
was shopping

10:34:31

Lesra Martin Yeah

10:34:33

Leland Martin You bought me my hundred dollar Adidas, you know what I'm saying?

10:34:35

Lesra Martin Yeah, you got spoiled.

10:34:39

Lesra Martin I said to him at that time, "You could stay you know, if you really want to. The only thing I would ask of you is that you give one year of university a try. You finish your high school and you give one-year university a try. And you don't have to stick with it if you don't like it." He was a very bright kid.

10:35:03

Lesra Martin He said to me that he couldn't say, that he couldn't stay at that time because my Mom, our Mom was very sick at the time with cancer, and he wanted to be there for her.

10:35:17

Leland Martin And right now it's still hard for me, even though you know, you have what's done. It's not like that. You don't live here with us like that. You come through to do what you got to do taking care of your brand of living your life; you know what I'm saying? But still, it's like you got to go away, again you know?

10:35:34

Lesra Martin Uh hmm

10:35:35

Leland Martin So we have to live with that. I mean, I do. I don't ache you about it but you know me, I keep my distance kind of, I don't want to get emotional, nothing like that. You know because I love you very much, you know.

10:35:47

Lesra Martin Yeah, I love you too.

10:35:48

Leland Martin I miss you Les

10:35:49

Lesra Martin I love you too. I miss you too but I'm here now. I'm here now. We're going to enjoy this.

10:35:53

Leland Martin Yeah

10:35:54

Lesra Martin I didn't see you the last time.

10:35:56

Leland Martin I know

10:35:57

Lesra Martin Thank you for coming this time

10:35:58

Leland Martin Yeah man. Thank you for having me man.

10:36:06

Lesra Martin To this day, I wish that Leland stayed or could have stayed but I know for his own reasons and, of compassionate reasons, he couldn't at the time. I don't give up though. I still think that there'll be a time that my whole family's back together. I'm looking forward to that day. Everyone will be out of a ghetto community and everyone will be happy again.

10:36:44

“Granny” I said, “Going to Canada?” They say, “Yeah.” But one year you didn’t come home.

10:36:49

Lesra Martin One year I didn’t come home?

10:36:51

“Granny” Yeah and your Daddy was carrying on the way, “Guess that boy better come back down here to see us too you know.” And I said, “Why don’t you let that boy alone? He don’t have to come down here every year just to see him, you know?” But your Daddy was just riled that you better come home and see him that year.

10:37:10

“Granny” But you did. I think you missed a year and you didn’t come. We made it somehow or another, you and I,

10:37:15

“Granny” and we still trying to make it right. Right?

10:37:19

Lesra Martin You know you said....

10:37:20

“Granny” Right?

10:37:21

Lesra Martin Yes, yes, yes, uh hmm.

10:37:23

“Aunt Pearl” It worked out beautiful. We was really proud of him you know and he saw that his family didn’t want for nothing. He would send things back through Sears....and that was a beauty, you know, one of them beautiful couches and the washing machines and stuff like that come in. That was so gorgeous you know and that made them very happy you know, to receive things that they couldn’t afford, you know what I mean?

10:37:46

Lesra Martin Yeah

10:37:47

“Aunt Pearl” So we’ve really been proud of him, ever since, you know, our Lesra. And he gave the mother and father a vacation to come and visit him, up to Canada. A limousine and all that stuff to the door. And I wish I had of been around for that!

10:38:11

Loriel Martin I can see my father now. He was just a proud man about his children anyway. An that smile, that just heart-warming smile that he would have, and my mother, being the beautiful woman that she was, she had a very gracious smile and she was, you could see everything in her heart on her face.

10:38:34:

Loriel Martin So I could see her being overwhelmed. You know she probably still is. She’s probably looking right down, right here, right now at her two children and she’s probably very, very proud of him.

10:38:43

Narrator Lesra’s parents didn’t live to see the fruits of their sacrifice. Dying too soon is a legacy of the ghetto.

10:38:52

Lesra Martin Elston was the brother just below me and I came back for a visit after about three months, and Elston and I were walking down the street. And Elston just looked up at me and he said, “Lez,” he used to call me “Lez,” why did you leave? Why’d you have to leave? You put all the pressure and responsibility on me to take care of the family. And I’m not sure that I can do it, I’m not having such a good time.”

10:39:25

Loriel Martin

Elston was very, very quiet. He was a homebody. He was basically going to pick up my niece from some sort of competition she had with someone else. He got out of the car and the person that she had had the confrontation with began shooting.

10:39:47

Narrator

He was thirty-one years old.

10:39:53

Lesra Martin

I think Elston's tragedy is the epitome of New York, epitome of ghetto life.

10:40:15

Lesra Martin

He was a decent kid you know. At the time in which he died, he was helping someone you know. And that was him, through and through.

10:40:32

Cheryl Martin

When I think of Lesra; had he stayed in New York, I automatically think of Elston. I never had the honour of meeting Elston but from what I hear from Lesra and his family about him, Lesra would be in the same situation. He wouldn't, knowing Lesra the diplomat, he would have been in the wrong place at the wrong time and he wouldn't have survived. He's thirty-seven today. He wouldn't have been.

10:41:07

Lesra Martin

I guess if there's anything that I feel guilty about, it's probably that I was chosen and not him, to have an opportunity to lead a better life; to be given proper access to opportunity; to be given a chance in life. I've often wondered why it was me and not him.

10:42:17

Narrator As Lesra buries his brother Fru, he sees the young men
of his family still struggling.

10:42:31

Lesra Martin I have met some good people in my life. People who
showed me in the wake of difficulty how to go all the
way in life; how to achieve the seemingly impossible,
and to remember to always play out the hand that you
have been dealt; don't fold. They showed me how to
believe that anything in this world is possible when you
set your mind to it.

10:43:00

Singing in church

10:44:25

Credits