

Book Review: Dear Dad By Ky-Mani Marley



Ky-Mani Marley's starring role in 2002's "Shottas" seemed like an unbelievable story of glorified gangsterism and cartoonish urban masculinity. As a son of the biggest reggae artist in the world who became famous for his ideals about humanity, it would seem impossible that he would know anything about economic struggles, street violence and clan conflict. His memoir *Dear Dad* uncovers a background that honestly bred the film from circumstances marked by privation that followed him from Jamaica to Miami. Ky-Mani's childhood was a fatherless trip that did not entitle him to the same kinds of provisions his siblings had until he became of age. The senior Marley's extramarital affair with Jamaican table tennis champion Anita Belnavis was subjugated by the responsibilities of stardom, a wife and other women. Ky-Mani's fleeting contact with his father ended completely when the elder musician passed from cancer in 1981. The complex politics of blended families is evident when Ky-Mani is unable to attend his father's funeral but sees his brothers Stephen and David dancing onstage at the ceremony. Material security lacked but he found the closeness with his mother's side of the family to be priceless. Bitterness evaded him and his mother because survival was always a critical anxiety.

Their journey from a two-room shack in Jamaica to a Miami ghetto is his introduction to crime, violence and thuglife. An uncle is a weed dealer who creates a scenario for Ky-Mani to manage the business and eventually sell his own product. Belnavis is a drug mule briefly who consults her son about her transactions and teaches him to use a gun. Interludes with his father's family at the mansion with his siblings were short surreal visits that increased his awareness of just how bumpy

life was at his permanent home. The chiding he received from schoolmates who learned of his situation exacerbated the already existing tension created from being a marginally recognized lovechild of a reggae superstar. Marley's sixth son eventually takes advantage of his father's DNA and becomes an artist. Music would start a course of rejuvenation regarding his feelings for his paternal family and give him new ground to bond with his brothers. The redemption his father sang about becomes his own when he accepts the brittleness of human nature with a compassion learned from his realization of the beauty in his struggle. *Dear Dad's* personal journal style and confessional tone implies a therapeutic exercise and an unintentional message of inspiration from the son of one of the world's biggest musical ambassadors.