



## Ex-Con on a Mission: The Randy Kearse Story

By Gary C. King

Research has shown that one out of every four prison inmates will return to prison within one to three years of his or her release, a phenomenon that does not say much for the rehabilitative effects of incarceration. Some blame the prison system, while others blame the inmates themselves for lacking the motivation to get on the straight and narrow. Regardless of who is at fault for the high rate of recidivism, however, one exception to the common pattern is Randy Kearse, an ex-con who chose to follow a different path.

Randy grew up in the Farragut housing projects in Brooklyn, N.Y. From the time he was young, Randy's parents tried to instill positive values in their son, hoping he would not stray from them as so often happens with those who grow up in the projects. They taught him the importance of education, and with their encouragement he did well in school. However, by age 17 things began to change. Bored with his studies, Randy desired a new outlet for his creativity and energy. Unfortunately, like so many others from his area, Randy turned his attention to selling drugs.

It was the lure of fast money that drew him. Crack cocaine was the drug of choice during the late 1980s and early '90s, and there was no shortage of addicts desperate to buy it. Unlike most drug dealers, Randy did not become a regular user himself. He realized from the start that a dealer couldn't make much money if he became dependent on his own product. Instead, he stuck to dealing, and within a short time his operation grew to encompass

three South Carolina cities. By then, he had assembled a gang of 25 men who helped him traffic the drug, pulling in an estimated \$100,000 per month. Randy would later say that the money came in so fast it was hard to keep up with how much he was making.

Randy's success as a drug dealer was destined to be short-lived. Few can play the game without getting caught, and in 1992, Randy was arrested for trafficking in crack cocaine. During his subsequent trial, the judge called him a "menace to society" and sentenced him to 15 years in a federal prison for conspiracy to distribute narcotics.

Unlike many inmates who choose to blame the system for their situation, rather than themselves for having landed in prison, Randy was profoundly affected by his conviction. The disappointment he saw on his mother's face cut him deeply. At 27 years old, he was beginning to understand the wisdom his parents had tried to pass down to him, and once again he began to value his mother's moral code.

On the day Randy began serving his sentence, another inmate was murdered, and this incident troubled him deeply. Not long after, a good friend and fellow drug dealer of Randy's was tortured and murdered. These two events were an eye-opener for Randy, and they strengthened his resolve to make a better life for himself. He did not want to become another statistic.

During his incarceration, Randy was struck with an inspiration when he observed another inmate with a book titled 1,001 Jokes. As he flipped through the pages, an idea began to form in his mind, and he decided to set about writing his own book about 1,001 street slang expressions. After all, material for the book was readily available, considering that Randy was locked up with people from coast to coast and thus had access to regional slang from all over the country. Randy also had contact with inmates

from different generations, which gave his list a historical flair. In fact, Randy's goal was easily met, and what had started as a project including 1,001 expressions soon turned into 10,001.

It took Randy seven years to complete his book project, and he was released from prison shortly thereafter, in 2005. Afterward, with the financial backing of his mother, Randy kept true to his dream and self-published the book *STREET TALK: Da Official Guide to Hip-Hop & Urban Slanguage*. He then sold it to Barricade Books, an independent publisher, who was able to distribute it to bookstores around the world. Excited by his newfound success, Randy quickly followed up with a second book, *Changin' Your Game Plan! How to Use Incarceration as a Stepping Stone for SUCCESS*.

Randy's second book has proved to be an inspiration to others and has helped many inmates make positive changes in their lives. In this book, Randy uses his own life story to inspire and teach. He does not focus solely on physical incarceration, but includes chapters on mental confinement as well. According to Randy, the purpose of the book is to reach out to youth, to show them the danger of heading down the same road he took. He writes passionately as he explains how to turn a negative situation into a positive one. In addition, he exposes what he refers to as the "game" and the ways in which people get caught up in it, preventing them from reaching their true potential.

Today, Randy is the president of Positive Urban Literature Inc., a company dedicated to promoting positive images within the African-American community. Randy continues to sell his books and often takes to the road as a motivational speaker at seminars and speaking engagements around the country.

Randy has appeared on Comedy Central's *Colbert Report*, *Tyeartv*, and various other television and radio programs. In addition, *Slate.com*, the *London Guardian*, *Brooklyn Courier* and a plethora

of Web sites have sought him out for interviews.

Randy Kearse took what, for many, would have been an insurmountable hurdle and turned it into an opportunity. He found a way to make his mistakes pay off, and in doing so he has helped reach others who find themselves in similar situations. While Randy is certainly in the minority — a driven and successful ex-con — he continues to work hard to help others.