

# Cultural Daily

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## K-Pook: From My Eyes to Yours

Mike Sonksen · Wednesday, February 22nd, 2017

The Los Angeles hip hop community is filled with dozens of dynamic characters. One of the most charismatic and well-loved personalities over the last 25 years is Keldren Joshua aka K-Pook. Over the years, the man has been a DJ, an MC, a radio show host and impresario of Los Angeles nightlife. Most recently he has made waves as a photographer. Due to his unparalleled access to top performers and DJs, his photos offer a candid window into Los Angeles hip hop and the daily life of a man that brings electric vibrations everywhere he goes. On Saturday February 25th, the Hvw8 Gallery on Melrose will be featuring [an exhibit of his photos titled, "From My Eyes to Yours."](#)

What makes this photo display even more significant is that Joshua was in prison for 10 years and recently released by President Obama's clemency initiative. Joshua had no prior offenses and was sentenced in 2006 for almost 16 years after being a middleman in a drug deal for a substance that he did not partake in. Though he knows that he did wrong and that he deserved some punishment for the offense, the sentence he got was far too severe for a man of his upstanding reputation. The only marks he had on his record were a few traffic tickets. For this reason, he was a perfect candidate for the clemency campaign that was initiated near the end of Obama's term.

Over the years, K-Pook had not only worked for companies like Bank of America and American Apparel, he's hosted several radio shows and is well respected around the city for many reasons. Before telling the story of how K-Pook won his freedom, it is important to spotlight his life story because his journey is one of a man that has given his heart and soul to the music and arts community and the city he loves so much.

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### A Social Magnet

Born in Compton in 1971, Joshua spent most of his childhood in Downey, with a few years in Inglewood during middle school. His grandparents moved to Downey in the early 1970s and they were one of the first black families in the area. He was the first black Homecoming King at Downey High School in his senior year. "I was one of 10 blacks at Downey High in 1989," he says. They had a hip hop crew called "The Mad Ball Posse" and they were huge fans of Public Enemy. One of his best friends was a Korean hip hop DJ and even while in high school, K-Pook was a social magnet.



I spoke with his mom Cheryl Shiver and she tells me, “his love for music was always ever present. He performed the Rob Bass song, ‘It Takes Two,’ in the Downey High talent show, and my Mom and I were in the audience that was 95% all white. My son, though never saw color. He blew the crowd away and right there is where it all began!” He has always been very close to his mom and they did everything together. She told me that she “took him to many concerts, LL Cool J, Run DMC, New Edition, just to name a few!” By the time he was in high school he became obsessed with music.

“I brought hip hop to Downey,” he says with a laugh. These were the days of flyer parties and also illegal warehouse jams that could be held anywhere from South Gate, Lynwood, Compton to Commerce, Maywood and Bell Gardens. He DJed hundreds of house parties and had friends in all the surrounding cities of every race and culture. “I was social media before there was social media,” he tells me.

### **A One-Man Radio Show**

By the early 1990s, K-Pook was friends with influential artists like DJ J Rocc from the World Famous Beat Junkies and could always be found attending venues like the Good Life Cafe and the legendary hip hop event Unity. Reminiscing on those early days, he says, “We were hip hop hippies. I loved De La Soul and rocked Daisy Age overalls.” He roamed from the Compton Swap Meet to the Cerritos Mall to Melrose buying records, hats, Diodoras, Filas. Famed for his magnetic personality, some even called him, “the dancing Gemini.”

In his early days as a DJ in high school, he was known as DJ Pud, but his nickname had always been “Pookie.” His grandmother nicknamed him this early in his childhood. Throughout his youth he was always a fan of radio, not just the celebrated hip hop station KDAY, but KNAC, KJLH and KROQ. “I created my nickname because I love radio,” he says. Essentially he shortened his childhood nickname and then combined it with a K because K is the start of radio call letters. Moreover, he was always so popular that he was considered a one-man radio show, and in the early 1990s he changed his hip hop moniker to K-Pook.

As the 1990s transitioned into the early 2000s, K-Pook became more and more of an institution in the Los Angeles hip hop community. He hosted several radio shows, one of the first was at Cerritos College with J Rocc from the World Famous Beat Junkies. Always a close comrade of the Beat Junkies, K-Pook could frequently be found in venues like The Chocolate Bar, Root Down, Firecracker, SoundLessons, Fat Beats, the Temple Bar, Frank n’ Hanks, and the Palace in Hollywood among countless others.

### **The Next Chapter**

K-Pook’s many years of success and hard work all came to a screeching halt in early 2006. In late 2005, he was arrested as a middleman in a drug deal. A friend of a friend had asked him to connect them with meth and he complied even though it was something he never did. As he told journalist Marisa Aveling, he was convicted of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute a controlled substance. Though he knew he deserved some punishment, “he hoped as a first-time offender with a criminal history of little more than a bunch of traffic tickets, he’d be looked upon favorably.” Instead the judge sentenced him to 188 months or 15 years and 8 months. He was dumbfounded to get such an extensive sentence on a first offense.

K-Pook was sent to the Terminal Island prison to begin serving his time. He made the decision to go in with a strong mindset and positive attitude. “I didn’t let the prison change me, I changed the prison,” he says. “I went in with a game plan, I wanted them (the guards and other prisoners) to see me as a human being,” he recalls. Ironically he says, “I turned prison into a sanctuary and I helped a lot of people while I was in there.”

He has always been the type of guy to think about others. He simply remained his natural ambassador-like self, eventually befriending everyone. He even mentored new guards on how to keep peaceful relations with the inmates. Simultaneously, his family visited him often, including his mom and an uncle that came every weekend. Eight years into his term, he received a letter from the federal defenders’ office in Los Angeles stating that they thought he was a good candidate for Obama’s clemency initiative.

Thanks to the help of federal defender Andre Townsend, he submitted his application. Well over a year later, on August 3, 2016, nine years and eight months after he was first incarcerated, he found out his release was approved. This day also happened to be his mother’s birthday. More on her thoughts in the next paragraph, but first a brief perspective from his attorney Andre Townsend. Townsend told Marisa Aveling that he could “see how clemency was granted.” Townsend goes on to say: “Quite frankly, I could see that he had over-served his sentence, and he had done a great deal of work while in prison to rehabilitate himself, and to prepare himself for a productive return to society.”

Once he was released K-Pook found out that the person who had asked him to make the drug deal was a police informant. He had been targeted and set up. As disappointing as this news was, K-Pook was just happy to be out and wanted to put the past behind him. His mother Cheryl Shiver though was not as forgiving. She says, “His arrest was part of a sting operation. He and other innocent parties throughout the United States are *sought out to commit crimes* by those who owe their freedom (*reduced sentence*) by providing favor to help the government seek and arrest other people.”

Shiver was alarmed when she found out more and she started researching other cases similar to her son. “The tax dollars used on these sting operations,” Shiver says, “should raise concern from all tax paying citizens. The so called ‘War on Drugs’ is a JOKE! It is big business and will never cease. 1 million people are incarcerated every year in the United States for drug law violations. They rarely arrest the real Kingpins, but instead they break up families by placing girlfriends, mothers, and side players like my Son in prison with harsh sentencing. The results strip them of voting rights and makes it difficult to gain employment.”

She is flabbergasted by how a single phone call to an informant and the stroke of a pen by a federal judge can ruin a man’s life and break a family apart. She is dismayed that the United States houses more prisoners than any country in the world.

### **Love Conquers All**

Nonetheless she is just thankful he is free now. She is grateful that “President Obama saw the raw inequity in the system and went to work. Freeing those whose sentences were harsh and undeserving.” She also feels that her son’s story “shows that where there is Love, there is Life after Prison. It is important because it shows how love conquers All. It shows how when you have the audacity to have hope... Hope prevails. My son is happy, employed, has housing and

transportation. Just 6 months out of prison. That in itself shows the character of Keldren C. Joshua. He is a Winner! He is loved by many, and gains new respect, associates and friends everyday.”



As his mom notes above, [K-Pook is out now and doing better than ever](#). His effusive positivity is effervescent and everyone that encounters him cannot help but be charmed by his warmth and kind spirit. Miguel Gutierrez is another well loved Los Angeles hip hop personality and longtime friend of K-Pook. Gutierrez says, “K-Pook is really more beneficial to us all out here in the free world where he answers without hesitation to our call, when we need a loving friend who does not hesitate to break bread, or give us a ride or laugh when we need to. He is special to me and all the folks that he has touched with his friendly demeanor and character that’s clutch. To have him back is a special gift we all have earned.”

Over the last six months, K-Pook has been working in Santa Monica at a shoe store and attending concerts, visiting old friends and enjoying life. He has become an avid photographer documenting every mission he makes. His work has attracted the attention of the Hvw8 Gallery on Melrose and Spaulding in Hollywood.

Over 40 of his photos are going to be included in an art show there on Saturday, February 25th, entitled “Political Minded, Mass Incarceration.” His portion of the program is titled “From My Eyes to Yours.” The images spotlight hip hop events, LA landmarks, old friends of his from the city’s art community and other candid images capturing the spirit of 2017 and his exciting journey. “The photos show LA living,” he says.

K-Pook will be presenting his photos at 4pm and also talking about his story. As much as it has been a roller coaster ride, he now wants to stay positive and uplift the community. He is working in the community arts scene and wants to build more unity across Southern California and the entire country for that matter. He is planning to host another radio show soon and will be collaborating on a clothing line. He recently told me: “the future is bright and I am always smiling.”

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