

IT HAPPENED TO ME... I SURVIVED THE NOTORIOUS LOS ANGELES GANG SCENE

FROM GANGS TO GONGS

TRUE LIFE

TWILIGHT BEY, 38, NARROWLY AVOIDED BECOMING ENSNARED BY THE DEADLY DRUG GANGS OF LOS ANGELES. HE WAS OFFERED A WAY OUT VIA EDUCATION. NOW, AS A YOUTH WORKER FOR KENSINGTON HOUSING TRUST, HIS WORK ATTRACTS PRAISE AS HE AIDS YOUNGSTERS TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE TO BENEFIT THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES. HE SPOKE TO **AIDAN JONES** ABOUT HIS LIFE

I WAS brought up in Watts, South Central Los Angeles; a place with a history of social upheaval and economic depression. In the 80s it led to mass unemployment, drugs and gangs. Then hard drugs came in and it was a dangerous place to be. We'd go home from school on a Friday and on the Monday everyone would be talking about who had been killed or shot that weekend.

I was heading into trouble when a few things happened to me which made me re-evaluate my life. I became a father after leaving high school. I also lost a lot of friends in shootings, or they were sent to jail.

I was lucky to be in a good school, where there was an emphasis on discipline and self-improvement. It gave me the chance to run discussion groups with rival gangs to find reconciliation between them. That's where my youth work started and I've been coming to the UK since 1994 to help develop mentoring and other programmes for youngsters.

I see a lot of similarities between what's going on in areas like North Kensington, and LA in the 80s. There are parallels between what

Thatcher and Reagan did to those at the bottom of the food chain.

I've been working with the Kensington Housing Trust since 2003, trying to help youngsters out of school or those about to leave realise what how they can help themselves and their communities.

Some of our young people were friends with Kodjo Yenga, who was stabbed to death. They are concerned about the future of their communities and problems with gangs and crime.

Pathways 2 Progress is about breaking apathy, building leadership, raising self-esteem. We hold drop-in sessions where we discuss issues important to them. It's about empowering youngsters to learn about their society, how things work and then engage with it. I guess you call it civic pride.

So many young

people don't have a clue about how government works. I tell them that they wouldn't play a game if they didn't know the rules, so why do they not know the rules about things that affect them?

We asked youngsters how they'd be affected by the regeneration of Wornington Green. We also took a group of young people to LA so they could see it for themselves. It was life-changing.

In London we have to act now to make sure gang problems are stopped, yet people still ask how bad the problem is! There's no time! The threat is real. Young people know it and want to change it, so we have to support them.



TWILIGHT TIME: Clockwise from bottom left: Maura Marley, Joanne Simpson, Twilight Bey, Rory Marley and Louise Tchikou

BUSH DELIGHT AT SALVATION

THE HIGH-PROFILE battle to save the Bush Theatre in Shepherd's Bush has been won.

Having caused dismay by announcing it was cutting £540,000 from its grant to the Bush – a move which could have killed it off – the Arts Council has done a dramatic volte-face.

A grovelling statement from Arts Council England belatedly conceded that it had failed to take into account the work the Bush does in nurturing new drama.

Now, instead of axing £540,000 of grant money to the Bush over the next three years, the 35-year-old theatre on Shepherd's Bush Green will get all its current cash... and more!

The humiliating U-turn vindicates the campaign, backed by the great and the good from Dame Judi Dench to Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter, to save the threatened space.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Josie Rourke, the Bush's artistic director, conceded: "It's been a stressful time for us."

Attributing the success of the survival battle to the "incredible support of staff, audiences and Hammersmith and Fulham Council", she said she had never given up hope that the Arts Council would reverse its decision.

The funding body's statement admitted it had failed to consider the full picture before making the swingeing cut.

"It is clear that our funding should also take account of the Bush's programme of development for playwrights and audiences," said the statement.

Now restored, the theatre's existing yearly grant of £490,748 has been secured, with inflation-proofing, until

2011. The Bush has a second-to-none reputation for fostering fresh, young talent in the industry, with a policy of only producing new plays.

Now it is up to the Bush to address issues about the theatre's location, with its only access up a precipitous staircase – denying entry to disabled people.

Set up by the experimental theatre visionary Brian McDermott, the tiny yet internationally acclaimed 80-seat theatre has been tucked away above a pub on the corner of Goldhawk Road and Shepherd's Bush Road for a third of a century.

Josie Rourke admitted: "Disability access and audience capacity are the main concerns. We need to get the owners of the building,

Mitchells and Butlers, and the council together and see what we can do to preserve this historical, beautiful theatre space."

The funding row began when Arts Council chairman Sir Christopher Frayling announced "the most comprehensive review of arts funding in its history" in December.

Given just a few weeks to appeal, Ms Rourke used the Freedom of

Information Act to see what criteria the Arts Council had based its cuts on.

She discovered that audience numbers had been grossly underestimated – a discrepancy the Arts Council admits, and which it "corrected quickly".

"We have learned things, people have had the opportunity to talk to us, we have listened. What's wrong with that?" asked Sir Christopher, when challenged about his organisation's handling of the funding issue.

Overall, funding for the 300 London institutions the Arts Council supports will rise from £480m to £536m over the next three years.

Catriona Macrae-Gibson, Arts Council England (London) spokeswoman, said: "It is a very positive settlement and is a reflection of culture's effects on the economy and people's quality of life."

Richmond's Orange Tree theatre has also been let off the hook; its 17 per cent funding cut scrapped. The Battersea Arts Centre is also celebrating after winning a 32 per cent rise from £507,000 to £635,000 annual funding.

However, 188 institutions around the country still stand to lose their entire grant – among them the Watermans arts centre in Brentford, which now intends to fight through the courts.

Christian McLaughlin



SIGH OF RELIEF: Josie Rourke of The Bush

IT'S OVER FOR ROVER

MESSY mutts who foul the streets or hassle passers-by may soon be the subject of dog control orders in Westminster.

Dog owners will be forced to keep pets on a lead and clean up after their animals. The orders will protect the public, especially young children.

A six-week consultation must be completed before the orders activate in two wards, Churchill Gardens Estate and Queens Park.

PAPER BINS APPEAR

THE DAYS of sodden free newspapers littering the pavement may be over after two publishers agreed to pay for 70 new recycling bins.

The bins, at 56 West End sites, will recycle an estimated 400 tonnes of free newspapers a year.

Westminster Council is chuffed after forcing the *London Lite* and *thelondonpaper* into a climbdown over who should foot the bill.

COPPERS' JOB SWAP

TOP COPS are doing a job swap in a shake-up of London policing. Ch Supt Dominic Clout has left Kensington and Chelsea for Camden,

replaced by Ch Supt Mark Heath. The men are the longest serving borough commanders in London. Ch Supt Heath will look at crime stats to see where resources can best be deployed.