

The EAST Collective

ONCE UPON A
HILLTOP





Once upon a time there was a neighborhood so lovely, so lively, so vibrant and filled with love and joy. This “hood” was called the Hilltop Neighborhood. Those who lived there called it “The Hill”.



The Hill hovered over Downtown Tacoma and if you stood at the top parking lot of Saint Joseph's Hospital, the tall alien shaped building on 19th Street, you can see all of the city. The Port, Commencement Bay, The Dome, even Mount Rainier.



The Hill was made up of black and brown face's with speckles of other cultures. The community there was rich and full of life. The foundation of the Hill was built only by the commitmnet of the people. That commitment produced the legacies that root and unify the Hill through and through. Today we remember the lives that were taken and the families and community members that paved ways for us to live on a thriving Hilltop.



Once upon the Hill lived Lisa "Sasa" Walten, Anthony "Little Tone" Buckles and Aaliyah "boonstin" Gibbs. Sasa, Little Tone and Boonstin grew up a few blocks away from each other.



Sasa moved to the Hill when she was 9 months. She remembers her first birthday at Peoples Park. She remembers her family smiling, the smell of BBQ filling the air and her older cousins causing ruckus on the big toy.



Sasa lived in the apartments above BROWNES where her mom was head bartender. Her family became good friends with the Waltens where she meet Boonstin and since then their families were always together. The Waltens supported the Hill in so many ways and Sasa became inspired to do the same.



Sasa saw women in her life and in her hood working proudly and passionately to continue the joy that radiated throughout the Hill. The businesses that were owned was a reflection of her. Henderson's a neighborhood barber shop was down the street from her apartment. She remembers her older brother going there to get a fresh cut. He would smile from ear to ear as he walked through the door with a bean pie in hand.



As Sasa grew older she realized that it was a challenge to create avenues for black women. She was determined to rise above the hate, scrutiny and iniquity that herself and her peers faced. It was because of her Mother's leadership, the Walten's dedication and the support she recieved from Boonstin and Little Tone that she was able to find her purpose and apply it to her community.



Little Tone met Sasa and Boonstin at The Dash center. DASH stood for Dancing Acting and Singing in Harmony. The Center is what they all called it and when they would hear people say "the DASH" they instantly exchanged laughter. Saying "The DASH" was an unspoken cuss word.



The Center is where Little Tone found his two best homies and his love for writing. Little Tone loved to write about the Hill. He wrote stories about any and everything. He wrote bout his young neighbors and their backyard shenanigans and japanese cherry blossom trees that bloomed so passionately every spring at his Middle School, Jason Lee.



Tone also wrote his hopes for the Hill after seeing too many of his neighbors, his people go. One piece of writing Tone carried with him as he grew older was about the 23rd & Ash street shoot out. He wrote because of impatience, we are being driven out of paradise, being shot at in our own neighborhood and when we defend ourselves we are the prosecuted.



Tone wanted his people to rise above the deliberate negative impact that has drastically affected his life and the many other people in it.



Little Tone understood the assignment when it came to protecting his hood. His young neighbors, his comrades at the DASH center. As a young man in a mans world he became a voice for his people. He used his pen to keep the Hill living on all days not just the ones where the system is working against his community.



**Boonstin was the life of any party!
She kept Sasa and Little Tone
cracking up. She'd always say
"Ya'll I dont where these things
come from, I think I got it from my
dad" they would all then share
silence before they busted out
into laughter again.**



Boonstin and her dad were really close. Every morning he would get up and make breakfast for her, mama and himself. They all sat at the dining room table, prayed and dug in. Then Boonstin's dad would get up to get ready to go to work at the 23rd Street Cafe.



They had an after breakfast tradition before he left. Dad would say " who ya wit" and I'd say ma dukes and Big pop thats my click. Mama would laugh at us every time. Dad would give me a big hug and gave mama a see ya later kiss. He never missed a breakfast.



One day after coming home from the Center Boonstin noticed her dad wasn't home. She called out to her mom and asked "Mama where's Dad"? She smiled and said Baby he should be home soon. Hours past and Dad still wasn't home. I knew that he would be home for breakfast because he never missed. Boonstin Decided to write her dad a letter so when he made it home he can read it.



Big Pop!

Thank you for always taking care of me and mama. She told me she thinks im funnier and not to tell you. Ha! I hope you make it home... Soon.