

INSPIRATION POINTE

A Collection of Stories, Letters, and Photos of Inspiration



Hip Hop, Cancer, and Michelangelo's Soul

By Timm Etters

I was sixteen and had already been heavily involved in the Hip Hop culture for about two years. It was all that I did. I was very active as the leader of our crew, **The Crew Masters**. Some of you reading this may remember us well. For those who don't, **The Crew Masters** were a group of young guys consisting primarily of old friends, but also a few new ones who became like family through our common interest in the new Hip Hop culture. I kept busy designing graffiti-styled jackets and t-shirts in study hall, counting BPMs on new records and trying to figure out just what in the world **Grand Mixer DST (DXT)** was doing on those turntables, practicing b-boy moves over and over again until night fell. When nighttime arrived, it was time to pack up the spray paint and head out to create murals on train bridges and underpasses all throughout the suburbs.

My life was active, exciting, and full of new treasures everyday.

I was then thrown into a spiral of challenges and emotions that very few people at that age are exposed to... testicular cancer had hit me hard and fast. After a day of surgery preparation, having my last rites read to me from a priest I didn't even know, and thinking about my new found Christian beliefs, I remember the night before my major surgery I was mentally & physically exhausted and very lost & confused. I was lying in the hospital bed wondering and worrying about the complexity of everything and what was to happen in the days to come as my thoughts were sharply interrupted by familiar voices echoing down the hallway of the hospital. It was the guys in **The Crew**. It was late and I had thought visiting hours were over, when into my room walked my best friends in the world all decked out in our **Crew Masters** uniforms. This was the only thing that made sense to me & the one simple thing I needed to see before going into early morning surgery.

Our DJ and co-founder of **The Crew**, Steve, had made me a special mix-tape for me to listen to during my recovery. We dropped it in the player and the rest of the guys and I did the most incredible thing. We separated the two beds and made plenty of space in the middle of the room for B-boys to do their thing... DANCE!! Of course, we did get in trouble, but it was the best backspin of my life, for in the back of my head, I thought it might be my last as well.

After surgery, the next few days were quite blurry as I was supposed to have been in ICU. I was heavily sedated, but came out of the operation as anticipated. I spent quite a bit of time in recovery, and it seemed each time I opened my eyes, there was one of two people sitting at my bedside, my mom or my best friend Bob; also a founding member of **The Crew**. It was during that time that I began to evaluate my life, again. With my pile of cassettes from Steve and my ghetto blaster on my nightstand, I began to make plans to get out of the hospital and validate my being a cancer survivor. **Grandmaster Melle Mel & the Furious Five's "Beat Street"** was a rap that had always stuck in my head. At this particular time, it wasn't the rap as a whole that I was

paying attention to, but a particular section, that would act as a compass and chart a new course for my life.

Here are the words:

*"...Well, a picture can express a thousand words
To describe all the beauty of life you give
And if the world was yours to do over,
I know you'd paint a better place to live.
Where the colors would swirl
And the boys and girls can grow in peace and harmony
Where murals stand on walls so grand,
As far as the eyes are able to see
Ha- I never knew art 'til I saw your face
And there'll never be one to take your place
'Cuz each and every time you touch a spray paint can,
Michelangelo's soul controls your hand..."*

There it was, a small piece of Hip Hop injected into my soul as if part of my prescribed medication. A few words arranged in such a way that I was able to see what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Unleash the artist within and learn as much as I could about Michelangelo and his accomplishments. Along with the fact that **Afrika Bambaataa** was already a mentor and influential leader in my life through his contributions to the culture, here were the words of Melle Mel repeating themselves over and over again in my head causing me to look deep within and see what my inspirations, gifts, and passions were. Those lyrics created the groundwork that would be the foundation of the company that I founded while still in the hospital.

Inspired as a young kid by local artists such as Scott Anderson & Lynda Wallis and some not-so-local pioneers of the Hip Hop culture, I set out to live the words in that rhyme. With my roots in graffiti, I am a professional mural artist and have painted over 300 commissioned murals on **"walls so grand"** and there's no sign of slowing down. As I look back through the years, I see the experience of those days in the hospital to be some of the most influential and most powerful blessings I've had to this day.

