



MyStory

So What Happened?

1st Blog Entry

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I wasn't really sure how I would start off this first blog for my new website. I didn't know all I would address, including how far I should go back for those who are new to me as a person, speaker, or entrepreneur.

I decided I should start where I made the mistake and then give context as I continue the story. I won't go into all the details, as some of that will be saved for later blogs, and even a book, as I will make mention of often.

I just think this is a good starting place no matter who you are, and how you know me, be it in passing, as a life long supporter, not fond of me at all or otherwise.

There's much more to my story holistically before this and moving forward, but for now, we start here.

In 2018, I was looking to find a business loan to finance production costs and open a store for my footwear and apparel company, ROCKDEEP. We had already been doing well on our website for quite some time. Years earlier, I had found success through a Kickstarter campaign that funded my first production pairs of ROCKDEEP sneakers, the Legacy and the T-Reign. That Kickstarter gave me the confidence to believe that I could keep building ROCKDEEP into something meaningful.



Around that time, I connected with a Chinese footwear and apparel company called RAX Ruixing and began assisting them with footwear designs. I did this free of charge, like a grown man interning, but I had a bigger plan in mind. RAX was struggling with sales, and at first they were hesitant to work with me.

I started reworking styles they already had, changing materials, colors, and designs slightly. They liked what they saw. The first SKU they moved forward with was the RAX Wolf, which became their / our best seller and still is today.



There are tons of Wolf styles now (*and I mean tons*), but if you want the full version of that story, you'll have to wait for the book or the movie.



Fast forward a year, and I began asking for residuals on designs I helped create. Another year later, I became owner of **RAX USA**, which became a subsidiary of ROCKDEEP. ROCKDEEP grew from selling outdoor footwear and apparel into sneakers as well, and soon enough we were becoming known in the outdoor industry for our hiking boots, trail shoes, and casual running footwear. At first, we were mainly selling products China couldn't sell, but we were moving a lot of units.



ROCKDEEP RAX

Still, I felt like something was missing. ROCKDEEP had a mission: to provide affordable, quality footwear that rivaled the giants, designed for people like me who didn't have money to blow on expensive shoes. I also wanted to give back to Black communities like the ones I grew up in—Alexandria, Arlington, and Oxon Hill. The problem? I didn't think Black folks bought hiking footwear. (Turns out I was wrong, but that's another story.)

I wanted to release a non-hiking sneaker that would be a beast, something I'd be proud of as one of my biggest accomplishments. My market research wasn't fancy. It was customers and potential customers telling me on social media that they loved the concepts I was posting and wanted me to release them. That confirmed I was on the right track.



(Mother Africa Sketches & Samples)



But to make it happen, I needed capital.

The Loan Hunt

I applied to several banks, both big and small. I thought I had a good shot because we were making decent money each year. Enough that I was even ready to open a small office space for me and my wife to ship inventory and run operations. But every bank found a reason to say no. The loan officers couldn't see past Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour. I tried to explain the size of the market, how even capturing a fraction of it would make us successful. But they didn't believe it.

After being turned down so many times, I had someone reach out claiming they had connections with banks looking to lend to businesses like mine. I'd heard that pitch before and usually brushed it off. This time the guy kept calling, and eventually he told me he had a local bank interested in meeting. We set it up at a hotel in National Harbor. I figured, what's the worst that could happen? Another no. But when he said it was in Oxon Hill, I took it as a sign.

We met, and for the first time, a banker actually seemed interested in what I was doing. He told me he liked my vision and asked to see my company's financials. I asked him straight up what numbers would put me in the ballpark for approval. He gave me the figure, and while I cursed inside, I told him it wouldn't be a problem.



Driving home, I thought about it. Hard. I didn't tell my wife the details—she was pregnant with our youngest, Filomena, and had enough to carry without worrying about this. I didn't want to stress her or make her complicit in what I was about to do.

And that's when I made the choice. I fudged the numbers.

Owning the Mistake

When I tell people this story, I get the same response sometimes: "Doesn't everyone fudge numbers on loan applications?" Maybe some do. But I knew better. And when the FBI showed up at my home office, I didn't hesitate. I told them, "Yes, I did it." They were surprised. They told me most people deny it until the very end. But I wasn't going to lie my way through it. I took responsibility.

That admission changed my life. I lost almost everything—except my wife, who stood by me no matter what, and my children, though even those relationships were strained at times. I disappointed customers and supporters who believed in me, and for that, I deeply apologize.

I know some say I could have just filed for bankruptcy, wiped the slate clean, and started over. Maybe that would have been easier. But I couldn't do that to the customers who put their faith in me. Many of them still reach out with encouragement, and I'll always appreciate that. For those I haven't responded to yet, I see you. I promise I will get back to you.

At the moment I've been choosing to keep my head down and do all I need to in order to keep the promise to customers I still owe and also to myself.

What's Next?

Even though I made a huge mistake, I'm still standing. I'm rebuilding. I'm focused on mental health, especially for men, entrepreneurs, and leaders who carry silent burdens. My story isn't just about a fall. It's about learning, surviving, and continuing to fight.

And this isn't the end. It's only the next chapter.

In future blogs, I'll share more; the customer reactions both positive and negative when this all became public, what happened after being charged, and even the [call I got from Shaq just before reporting to prison](#). You'll get glimpses here, but the full versions will come in the book and maybe the movie.

So stay tuned. Especially those who have long awaited my demise or those who apparently were quick to show your real feelings and make things personal by attacking my family; don't get too happy too soon.

If you haven't learned by now that obstacles and roadblocks don't keep me from moving forward, you really haven't been paying attention.

So you may want to start now - I've got so much more to do and say.