

## Tribute To Eazy-E

Written by Staff ID9  
Wednesday, 22 September 2004 20:05 -

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### Eric "Eazy-E" Wright

This coming March (2005) will be the 10th anniversary of the death of Eric 'Eazy-E' Wright.

Since we claim to keep the legacy of Tupac alive and we rep the westcoast artist, it is only fitting that we not forget Eric.

The tragic loss of Eric, before his time; is often over shadowed by the passing of Tupac. It seems Eric does not get the full credit and admiration he deserves nor is he remembered for his accomplishments in the music and entertainment fields.

From the streets of Compton to NWA to Ruthless Records,, Eric 'Eazy-E' Wright made his mark. And it is sad that he is not remembered in the way that some other artist are remembered.

Ruthless Records brought us many gangsta tracks. Eazy paved the way for the gangsta rap movement. He had Dr. Dre, he discovered and brought us the Bone Thugs. He added so much to the 'rap' game with his street savvy and business skillz.

I have always enjoyed and respected Eazy's work and his tracks still are played here with the same enthusiasm as they were in the 90's.

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This small page of information is in it's own way our little tribute to one of rap's biggest contributors and a legend in the rap and recording fields.

We can only imagine how different the 'game' would be today if Eric were still with us, but what he started and contributed to is what we still enjoy – and that is west coast gangsta rap.

Don't let the memory of this true legend be lost or over shadowed by others who have passed or those that may be coming up. Eric 'Eazy E' Wright paved the way for the ones coming up, and he contributed and helped build the rap game. So anything that comes after that we can in part thank Eric Wright for.

Just never forget; always remember and appreciate where the roots of rap and hip hop came from. R.I.P. – Eric 'Eazy E' Wright

### Eric "Eazy-E" Wright Bio (1)

Eric "Eazy-E" Wright lived a life that went up and down. He started out as a low profile gangster rapper that few people knew. Also he came from a small town out of Los Angeles that was not well known either. Though when Eazy-E went out everyone knew where he came from and who he was.

The life of gangster rapper Eazy-E began on September 7, 1963, in Compton, California. His parents were both successful workers, his father was a postal worker and his mother a school teacher. Eazy-E lived his life hating police violence, but surprised people by lending his support to, police officer, Theodore Briseno. Briseno was one of the suspects in the Rodney King beating. Thigpen wrote what Eazy commented, ""Everyone thinks four white officers beat up Rodney King. That's wrong. Briseno is a Mexican American, and he happens to be the only person who tried to stop it."" Eazy-E was criticized by many people because of this, but was quoted by Thigpen, ""I don't care what people say. I'd rather be a leader than a follower.""

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Eazy-E received support from his wife Tomika Woods-Wright, whom he married in the hospital days before he died. When Eazy-E was not helping people he was rapping about what he believed

After Eazy-E left home and went out on his own he went to the music business. He started the record label Ruthless Records, and is the founding father of the rap group N.W.A., Niggaz With Attitude. N.W.A. was made up of rappers Eazy-E, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and MC Ren that put together two CDs that reached the #1 spot on the Billboard charts, and a few other CDs. N.W.A. was the same as any other group, they all wanted to be the leader. So in 1990 they were fed up and started to break up. The first ones to go onto become soloist were Ice Cube and Dr. Dre. After N.W.A. split up Eazy-E also became a soloist, releasing five CD's one of which hit #5 on the Billboard, "It's On (Dr. Dre) 187um Killa." Eazy-E was not just a song writer, but a man who helped charities raise money. Because of this he was invited to join the Republican Senatorial Inner Circle and have lunch with president George Bush. Eazy-E was also noticed when he released "Str8 Off Tha Streetz of Muthaphu—in Compton," that tells about who he really is. Eazy was not the only one being produced by Ruthless Records, new CDs by MC Ren, Chris Tucker, and many others are scheduled to be released in 1998. Because of Eazy-E, Ruthless Records became a very well known business.

Eazy-E's life and career were running strongly until the news of his illness hit the news. On March 16, 1995, Eazy-E was diagnosed with AIDS. That day Eazy-E released a press conference on his illness. Dan Snierson quoted Eazy-E at his press conference, ""I may not seem like a guy you'd pick to preach a sermon, but I feel it's now time to testify."" David Wild also quoted Eazy, ""Like the others before me, I would like to turn my own problem into something good that will reach out to all my homeboys and their kin, because I want to save their asses before it's too late."" He was hospitalized February 24, 1995, March 26 he died. Eazy-E was one of the first major rappers to die from AIDS, and is being watched by many because of it. Before Eazy died he was visited by N.W.A. members, Ice Cube and Dr. Dre, and fellow rappers Hammer and Snoop Doggy Dogg. Eazy-E's death has opened up AIDS to people who thought it could not happen to someone they knew. Eazy-E's death had the same effect on people as Magic Johnson's did. His death has also boosted his record sales. While Eazy was dying he was in the middle of an album titled "Str8 off tha Streetz of Muthaph---in Compton." When Eazy died his CD was not finished, so his close friend DJ Yella finished it for him. After Eazy-E died his wife, Tomica Woods-Wright, was left with Ruthless Records, and three children. Tomica stated that she wants to keep Ruthless open to groundbreaking artists, the way Eazy had it. His death will always be remembered by those close to him, because he opened their eyes to death and AIDS.

Rapper Eazy-E lived a tough life. He started out as just a normal guy until he hit the music business. He went from unknown to well known in a year due to the publicity he received. Eazy-E was a great person and rapper, and will always be remembered for what he did, not for what he did not do.

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### Eric "Eazy E" Wright Bio (2)

Whether as a member of N.W.A., a solo act, or a label head, Eazy-E was one of the most controversial figures in gangsta rap. While his technical skills as a rapper were never the greatest, his distinctive delivery (invariably described as a high-pitched whine), over-the-top lyrics, and undeniable charisma made him a star. Following N.W.A.'s breakup, E's street credibility took a major beating, though his recordings continued to sell well when they appeared; unfortunately, he was diagnosed with AIDS in 1995, and died not long after.

Eric "Eazy-E" Wright was born September 7, 1964, in Compton, CA, a rough part of the Los Angeles metro area that N.W.A. would later make notorious. A high school dropout, Wright turned to drug dealing to support himself, and eventually used the profits to start his own rap label, Ruthless Records, with partner and music-business veteran Jerry Heller. E discovered a major performing talent in the D.O.C., and recruited Ice Cube and Dr. Dre to write songs for his stable of artists. When their composition "Boyz-N-the Hood" was rejected by Ruthless signee HBO, Cube, Dre, and E formed the first version of N.W.A. to record it themselves. Their first album, N.W.A. and the Posse, was released in 1987 and largely ignored; after a few tweaks of the lineup and the rough-edged subject matter, 1988's Straight Outta Compton made N.W.A. into superstars. E seized the opportunity to release a solo project later in the year, titled Eazy-Duz-It, which would be the only full-length album he would complete; it would sell well over two-million copies.

After Ice Cube's bitter departure from N.W.A. toward the end of 1989 (precipitated in part by Heller's business tactics), Eazy-E took over his not inconsiderable share of the rapping and songwriting duties, becoming the group's dominant voice on 1991's Efil4zaggin. His taste for cartoon-ish vulgarity began to undermine the claims of realistic inner-city reporting that the group had used to defend themselves. Disputes between the members led to N.W.A.'s breakup that summer, and a court battle between Ruthless and Dre's new label Death Row soon followed, with Eazy alleging that Death Row head Suge Knight had coerced Ruthless into releasing Dre from his contract. The case was eventually thrown out, but a bitter feud between Dre and Eazy raged for the next several years; Dre's seminal solo debut The Chronic made merciless fun of Eazy. E's 1992 solo EP 5150 Home 4 tha Sick sold well, but did little to dispel his increasingly cartoon-ish image; he found more success running the Ruthless label, with a roster that included Above the Law, N.W.A. bandmate MC Ren, the poorly received all-female group H.W.A. (Hoez With Attitude), and, eventually, the lucrative Bone Thugs-N-Harmony. Eazy addressed his feud with Dre on the 1993 EP It's On (Dr. Dre) 187um Killa, which famously included an actual photo of Dre wearing makeup and sequins during his World Class Wreckin' Cru days. Still, save for dissing Dre, Eazy didn't seem to have much to say, and despite healthy record sales, his artistic credibility was declining at an alarming rate. Eazy didn't help matters much when, in early 1993, he spoke out in support of Theodore Briseno, the only LAPD officer

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involved in the Rodney King beating to express displeasure; later in the year, he paid 2,500 dollars to attend a Republican fund-raiser, which his detractors saw as a further betrayal of his roots.

In early 1995, Eazy entered the hospital with respiratory difficulties, believing he had developed asthma. The diagnosis was far more serious: he had contracted AIDS. Eazy announced his plight to the public shortly thereafter, winning admiration for his straightforward attitude. Sadly, just a few weeks later, on March 26, 1995, the disease claimed his life. The record he had been working on, *Str8 Off tha Streetz of Muthaphukkin Compton*, was released posthumously (in unfinished form) later on in the year. In 2002, on the seventh anniversary of his death, some previously unreleased material from the Ruthless vaults was released as the EP *Impact of a Legend*, which was accompanied by a DVD. ~ Steve Huey, All Music Guide

## NWA BIO

N.W.A, the unapologetically violent and sexist pioneers of gangsta rap, are in many ways the most notorious group in the history of rap. Emerging in the late '80s, when Public Enemy had rewritten the rules of hardcore rap by proving that it could be intelligent, revolutionary, and socially aware, N.W.A capitalized on PE's sonic breakthroughs while ignoring their message. Instead, the five-piece crew celebrated the violence and hedonism of the criminal life, capturing it all in blunt, harsh language. Initially, the group's relentless attack appeared to be serious, vital commentary, and it even provoked the FBI to caution N.W.A's record company, but following Ice Cube's departure in late 1989, the group began to turn to self-parody. With his high-pitched whine, Eazy-E's urban nightmares now seemed like comic book fantasies, but ones that fulfilled the fantasies of the teenage white suburbanites who had become their core audience, and the group became more popular than ever. Nevertheless, clashing egos prevented the band from recording a third album, and they fell apart once producer Dr. Dre left for a solo career in 1992. Although the group was no longer active, their influence -- from their funky, bass-driven beats to their exaggerated lyrics -- was evident throughout the '90s.

Ironically, in their original incarnation N.W.A were hardly revolutionary. Eazy-E (born Eric Wright), a former drug dealer who started Ruthless Records with money he earned by pushing, was attempting to start a rap empire by building a roster of successful rap artists. However, he wasn't having much success until Dr. Dre (born Andre Young) -- a member of the World Class

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Wreckin' Cru -- and Ice Cube (born O'shea Jackson) began writing songs for Ruthless. Eazy tried to give one of the duo's songs, "Boyz-n-the Hood," to Ruthless signees HBO, and when the group refused, Eazy formed N.W.A -- an acronym for Niggaz With Attitude -- with Dre and Cube, adding World Class Wreckin' Cru member DJ Yella (born Antoine Carraby), the Arabian Prince, and the D.O.C. to the group.

N.W.A's first album, N.W.A. and the Posse, was a party-oriented jam record that largely went ignored upon its 1987 release. In the following year, the group added MC Ren (born Lorenzo Patterson) and revamped their sound, bringing in many of the noisy, extreme sonic innovations of Public Enemy and adopting a self-consciously violent and dangerous lyrical stance. Late in 1988, N.W.A delivered Straight Outta Compton, a vicious hardcore record that became an underground hit with virtually no support from radio, the press, or MTV. N.W.A became notorious for their hardcore lyrics, especially those of "Fuck tha Police," which resulted in the FBI sending a warning letter to Ruthless and its parent company, Priority, suggesting that the group should watch their step.

Most of the group's political threat left with Cube when he departed in late 1989 amid many financial disagreements. A nasty feud between N.W.A and the departed rapper began that would culminate with Cube's "No Vaseline," an attack on the group's management released on his 1991 Death Certificate album. By the time the song was released, N.W.A, for all intents and purposes, was finished.

In the two years between Cube's departure and the group's dissolution, N.W.A was dominated by Eazy's near-parodic lyrics and Dre's increasingly subtle and complex productions. The group quickly released an EP, 100 Miles and Runnin", in 1990 before following it up early the next year with Efil4zaggin ("Niggaz 4 Life" spelled backward). Efil4zaggin was teeming with dense, funky soundscapes and ridiculously violent and misogynist lyrics. Naturally, the lyrics provoked outrage from many critics and conservative watchdogs, but that only increased the group's predominately male, white suburban audience. Even though the group was at the peak of their popularity, Dre began to make efforts to leave the crew, due to conflicting egos and what he perceived as an unfair record deal.

Dre left the group to form Death Row Records with Suge Knight in early 1992. According to legend, Knight threatened to kill N.W.A's manager Jerry Heller if he refused to let Dre out of his contract. Over the next few years, Dre and Eazy engaged in a highly publicized feud, which included both of the rappers attacking each other on their respective solo albums. Ren and Yella both released solo albums, which were largely ignored, and Eazy continued to record albums that turned him into a complete self-parody until his tragic death from AIDS in March

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1995. Before he died, Dre and Cube both made amends with Eazy. With his first solo album, 1992's *The Chronic*, Dre established himself as the premier hip-hop producer of the mid-'90s, setting the pace for much of hardcore rap with its elastic bass and deep, rolling grooves. Gangsta rap established itself as the most popular form of hip-hop during the '90s -- in other words, N.W.A's amoralistic, hedonistic stance temporarily triumphed over the socially conscious, self-aware hip-hop of Public Enemy, and it completely rewrote the rules of hip-hop for the '90s. ~ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, *All Music Guide*

Compton, California is a small suburb of Los Angeles, a place known for its vast history of rags-to-riches stories, stardom, glamour, and fame. Compton has emerged from being just another surrounding area of Los Angeles to one of the country's most well known cities. That fact is attributed to the music in which Compton helped give birth to and make so famous. "Gangsta" rap has developed into a money making enterprise, spreading misogynistic messages, violent overtures, and the theories of toting guns as if it was a sport. Sometimes, the words would prove to be more fiction than fact, but the attention was attracted nonetheless.

One of the artists responsible for making this era of music so spectacular is Eazy-E, a gangsta rapper whose claim to fame was not the music, but in the way he presented it. With a career that would span almost a decade, Eazy became the mark of excellence in gangsta rap, but as with all success comes a price. Eazy would rise above many obstacles that would kill just an average person, and tasted the fruits of his labor until his untimely demise.

Born Eric Wright in 1964, Eazy grew up with the same hopes and dreams as most young men from an impoverished background. He wanted to make it big, no matter how he had to do it. Hip-Hop was a flourishing conglomerate, very legal, and one that could provide a way of life that make most envious to the point of rage. The Hip-Hop scene on the western section of the United States was not as lush as it was in the east, but all that would make a drastic change.

Dealing drugs to make a living, Eazy finally did something positive with the money that was leading to the bloodshed on the streets. He took a portion of his earnings and formed a rap label, called Ruthless Records. The attempt to start his rap empire didn't prove fruitful until up and coming artists Ice Cube and Dr. Dre began to write for the label. When HBO, the signing company of Ruthless Records refused to take one of the group's songs, titled "Boyz In The Hood," they formed the group N.W.A., an acronym for Niggaz With Attitude. They would bring aboard 1 more member DJ Yella, and the five-man team would begin to blaze the trail that we know today as gangsta rap.

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Eazy and the rest of the crew would go on to release two more albums, "100 Miles and Runnin'" in 1990 and "Efil4zaggin" (which is Niggaz 4 Life backwards) the following year, and the albums were mostly Eazy flexing his lyrical muscle. Some of the lyrics provoked outrage from many critics and conservative circles, but that only increased the group's predominately male, White suburban audience. Even though the group was at the peak of their popularity, Dre began to make efforts to leave the crew, due to conflicting egos and what he perceived as an unfair record deal. Dre and Eazy would then delve into a widely publicized feud that would run its course over a few years. Eazy then would have to make the transition as a solo artist, but seemingly the transition was made rather smoothly.

Eazy had released his debut solo album in 1988, titled "Eazy Duz It," which would ultimately be his only full-length album. It was received well amongst fans, particularly in California. Although he would never achieve the astronomical success he received with N.W.A. on a commercial level, he still was considered a force in Hip-Hop. Fans across the nation had begun to see a change in Hip-Hop, and Eazy was one of the many driving forces behind it.

Amidst the drama that was going on between he and Dr. Dre, Eazy decided to take the bold step of addressing the issue on record. "It's On (Dr. Dre) 187um Killa" was released in late 1993, which proved to be a depiction of the murder of Dre on record, and it attracted major attention. The unapologetically violent album would be the first of many on-record feuds between Dre and Eazy, and it shed a lot of light on the issues between the former partners. It also marked the decline in Eazy's vastly flourishing career.

In 1995, the Hip-Hop nation was struck with alarming news. In a publicized statement, Eazy



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announced he had contracted HIV, the virus that caused AIDS. No one, including Eazy himself had a clue about how sick he actually was. During the week of 20th March, the star drafted his last message to fans (check the last words section). One month after making that haunting announcement, Eazy succumbed to the disease at a local hospital in Los Angeles. He was 31 years old at the time of his death. Before he died, Eazy had made amends with Ice Cube and Dr. Dre, the men whom he skyrocketed to success with and rewrote Hip-Hop history with. A man of his talents has been deeply missed since his passing, and the game has had the unenviable task of going on without him.

Two postmortem albums were subsequently released, "Eternal E" in 1995 after his death, and "Str8 off Tha Streetz of Muthaphukkin Compton," in 1998, both of which proved to be successful. An upcoming group discovered by Eazy, were in the beginning stages of their careers, which would prove fruitful later on. The legacy of Eazy E lives on in the hearts and minds of Hip-Hop and its long list of fans.

Eazy E: 1964-1995 R.I.P.

### **An unpublished interview with Eazy-E, February 1995 at the Ruthless Headquarters.**

Forward letter of bereavement by Allen S. Gordon

Eric Wright founded the perfect "legion of doom," only to have a number of so-called super-friends fracture the team into separate entities. When Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Michel"le and the D.O.C. departed from Ruthless Records to persue other ventures, their accusations of Wright "pimping" their talents and not distributing the wealth fairly struck Wright at the core of his being. With raised eye-brows, fans and critics alike turned their backs on the 5'5" Compton native and most of his roster.

Yet, only after Wright's death, in regards to the financial feuds between Ice Cube and former associates (Kam, Lench Mob, Torcha Chamber, DJ Pooh and Sir Jinx) and the revelation of all the scandalous dealings that existed during and after the departure of D.O.C. and Dr. Dre from Death Row records, do we find that Wright appeared to be right all along. Right, but not

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vindicated. Aside from his family and friends, who mourns for Eazy-E? Before being incarcerated and exposed, Hip-Hop periodicals toasted Suge Knight with cotton candy articles, when his "acquisition" of Dre, D.O.C. and Michel"le was an act of villainy, six years removed. Shoulda" spoke up when Eazy got muscled instead" waitin" till the Negro version of Wilson Fisk got locked up.

This interview, which took place two months before Wright passed away, has never been published. What state of mind and health Wright was in during this interview will become apparent as you continue to read. Wright was bitter because his family was abducted, yet he remained optimistic about a reunion because all parties would soon come to grips with the truth. The publishing of this piece is not intended to attack or belittle anyone. So with this last article, Eric "Eazy-E" Wright, consider yourself vindicated.

With tears,

Allen S. Gordon, some kid you gave \$700 cash to help put through college.

RP: Lately, you've talked a lot about jealousy.

Eazy: Those may hate you, but when you hate them...you destroy yourself [he coughs for a while. After a moment, he puts a tape in the deck]. This is some of the producing that I've been doing. I was thinking this would be a good track for me and Ren.

You did this track? I didn't know you produced.

I did a lot of songs on N.W.A. All that old @#%\$. I didn't want the credit because I'm the company, I'm an artist myself, I had a solo album before N.W.A. was out, and I'm in the group (coughs). I didn't want the credit because everyone has egos. I'm getting paid for being in a group and (for) owning the company and being a solo artist. Here's what Dre did. Say me and Ren would come up with a whole idea for a song. Dre was good at putting it together. So we might have an idea for a song, lay it down at home on a little four track or 12 track, and (then) Dre would put it together, him and DJ Yella.

Which N.W.A. tracks are you talking about in particular?

"Findum, \*\*\*\*em and Flee," "She Swallowed It"...me and Ren did a lot of stuff. "Approach to Danger"... a lot of them. I can't remember all of them. A lot of stuff, you could tell if you knew Dre [and] his style. He was in N.W.A., but Dre came from the Wrecking Crew, but I got him to do this other type of music I wanted to do, the gangsta @#%\$, and I got Dre away from what he was doing. Ice Cube was from C.I.A. and the Stereo Crew, and if you knew their style, they were like the Beastie Boys. I put" em together, and we formed N.W.A., and they changed their style. And they started hollering Compton because that's where we were from: me, Ren, and Yella.

You want me to put this in here?

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Yeah. Whether I had some fake people with me or not. But when Ice Cube split, he never hollered Compton no more. He started hollering "How to survive in South Central." You haven't heard him holler Compton no more. If you look back in the people's pasts and check their style, you'll where they really came from. Go back to their past and see what they were doing in the beginning. Dre, if you listen to his style of music from N.W.A. to now, it's totally different. Dre stole that style [G-funk] from Cold 187um, Rhythm D and a couple of other people he stole from. Dre stole stuff from that, Above The Law's, Black Mafia Life's "Never Missing a Beat." [He coughs twice, then three times] They're good songs.

So how old are you?

Young. [Coughing] Just young. Nobody knows how old.

People say you got the money together to finance Ruthless Records by selling drugs.

They can say whatever, but whatever it came from, they can't prove it.

What's up with you and Cube these days? Are you working with him on anything?

Me and Cube is cool. That's all I can say. We've sat down an" talked a couple of times. I've got nothing against him.

What do you think are some of the misconceptions people have about Ruthless Records?

Number one...that it's my company. I'm the sole owner. There's no investors, there's no partners. It's my company.

Looking at the number of successful Black-owned record companies and how you were one of the first to...

Even if they're Black-owned, they're being financed by someone else. There's a lot of companies, like Russell (Simmons), Andre Harrell's Uptown Records, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis's label. You had Motown...

Motown is not Black-owned.

It was at one time. I said, "You had Motown." (He laughs) Jermaine Dupris is doing something now. Yeah, I was one of them. Then everyone else who broke off from me, some of them is doing good.

Getting back to misconceptions...

I treat my artists real good. All that, "He @#%\$ me"...then why am I still making money off them? If someone @#%\$ me, they wouldn't be making a dime off me. Dre went out running his mouth off, and nothing he said was true. Everything was false. I still make money off him; I still got about five more years to go.

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So what you're saying is that if you were ripping Dre off, that courts would have ruled on his side? The paperwork...

Yeah, contracts and everything, and I worked out a deal with Interscope. I give my artists fair deals. I start them off at 12 points, with escalation at every 500,000. In the publishing, a 50-50 split. Today, most people take 100% of the artist's publishing. I know a lot of people who have sold 4 million records and ain't even seen a million dollars. That ain't no record deal. Now I'm not trying to give out any big advances because that's recoupable. That's your own money. If you take a big advance, you'll have to pay that back (if you don't sell enough units).

Eric Wright : His Death Details.

On March 15, Eric "Eazy-E" Wright lay in the intensive care unit of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He was 31 years old and fighting for his life. Heavily sedated, Eazy-E had a respirator tube running down his throat to help him breathe. In the cramped, fluorescent-lit room, a few close friends and Tomica Woods-his new wife and the mother of his youngest son-gathered around his bed.

"We told him we loved him, " says Jacob T., a six-foot-three, 300-pound Samoan, one of Eazy's longtime twin bodyguards. He and his brother, John T., were with Eazy through most of his last days. "But he couldn't talk. Then we said, "If you can hear us, just squeeze our hand." He did."

Big Man (a.k.a. Mark Rucker), who grew up with Eazy in Compton, removed a gold ring his wife had given him on their 10th anniversary. He slipped it on Eazy's index finger. "I told him, "I want you to give this back to me when you get out of here." " But Eazy never got out. His immune system had become too weak to fight off the infection that was ravaging his lungs.

About a week later, Eric Wright fell unconscious and remained so until he died on March 26, 1995, at 6:35 p.m., from AIDS-related pneumonia.

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The announcement that Eazy had AIDS sent shock waves throughout the hip hop nation. Fans, friends, even journalists wept openly on March 16 as his attorney, Ron Sweeney, read a statement from his client outside the old Motown building in Hollywood. The founder of N.W.A, the man who popularized gangsta rap worldwide, was suddenly thrust into the role of AIDS educator: "I would like to turn my own problem into something good that will reach out to all my homeboys," Eazy said through Sweeney. "I want to save their asses before it's too late. I'm not looking to blame anyone except myself."

Though Eazy didn't say (and perhaps didn't know) how he contracted the virus, he implied that it was through unprotected sex with women. "I have seven children by six different mothers," said the statement. "Maybe success was too good to me." At the Beat, L.A.'s KKBT-FM, where Eazy had hosted a show every Saturday, the phone rang. It was Snoop Doggy Dogg, who, in a call filled with long, pregnant silences, said he was praying for Eazy. The next day Ice Cube phoned in.

"Me and Eric worked out our differences," said Cube. "I had just seen him in New York, and we talked for a long time. We was laughing and kickin' it about how N.W.A should get back together. I'm just waiting for a call that says he's cool enough for me to go to the hospital and check him out...and let him know that he's still the homie, when it comes to me."

On Friday, March 17, Dr. Dre-who's traded wicked insults with Eazy since the dissolution of N.W.A-paid a visit to Cedars-Sinai. Dre got in; he saw Eazy. Only he knows what, if anything, was communicated. By that time, the hospital's switchboard had been blowing up for two days straight.

"We've been overwhelmed with thousands of phone calls asking about Eazy-E," says Paula Correia, Cedars-Sinai's director of public relations. "Lots of young, people-emotional, upset, concerned. We've had a high volume of calls for other celebrity patients-Lucille Ball, George Burns, Billy Idol-but never this many."

But not everyone was sympathetic. According to one hospital staffer, some women claiming to be Eazy's former lovers were phoning in death threats. Across the country, at a panel discussion in Virginia, Compton rapper DJ Quik was saying that Eazy-E knew he had the disease two years ago and vowed to spread it around. (Ruthless employee Keisha Anderson went on KKBT on March 16 and said that "Eazy was tested 18 months ago, and it was negative.") Rumors were snowballing: Eazy was a closet homosexual, Eazy was a heroin

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addict. Eazy was on his deathbed, Eazy was getting better. On and on. The fevered gossip said more about the anxiety running through Planet Hip Hop than it did about the truth.

Eazy-E was the first major pop music figure who was not openly gay to die from AIDS. But instead of seizing this opportunity to educate, the media downplayed Eazy's death. MTV had devoted around-the-clock coverage to Kurt Cobain's suicide, but squeezed only a few paltry minutes on Eazy into their regular MTV News broadcasts. The New York Times and People offered slightly expanded obituaries, and BET seemed asleep at the wheel. The media's laxity was especially shameful considering that Eazy's core audience-young people of color-are currently contracting the virus at such an accelerated rate.

A middle-class kid from Compton who got caught up in drug dealing and petty crime, Eazy went legit by investing his money in his own label, Ruthless Records. With his distinctive, high-pitched whine, Eazy coined the term "Boyz-N-the Hood" and ushered in the gangsta rap era. "As long as you're being talked about, " said the man whose rhymes enraged the FBI-yet who, in 1991, took time out to hang with George Bush-"people still remember you."

Right before he got sick, Eazy was at his busiest: shopping a screenplay, executive producing Bone Thugs "N" Harmony's upcoming album, and preparing to release his own oft-delayed double album-a collection culled from more than 70 tracks recorded with everyone from Bootsy Collins to Slash of Guns N" Roses.

"He was driven by the thought that when he was sleeping, he was missing something, " says Jerry Heller, Eazy-E's longtime friend, personal manager, and the controversial former general manager of Ruthless Records. "He worried that people were getting ahead of him. He just never slept."

"Eazy lived the life of a straight-up G, " says Rhythm D, one of Eazy's former roommates and producers. "You know. A mack." Heller puts it more gently: "Eazy loved women. He had lots of them. Lots of kids. They were a big part of his life." "I knew he was sleeping with other people, " says one of Eazy's most recent girlfriends. "But I didn't know to what extent. It was only after he went into the hospital that I found out he was living with this other woman, Tomica. But he was never anything but good to me. As far as I was concerned, we were still together."

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Linda Bell, the mother of Eazy's second-oldest child, a nine-year-old girl, says she and Eazy were no longer seeing each other but that he willingly provided for their child. On the day of her own HIV test, she spoke highly, if somewhat numbly, of her former lover: "Eric was so busy it was hard for him to spend time with his daughter. Just before he got sick, he said he was gonna come pick her up and take her to some event-the Ice Capades. He never did get the chance."

Even though Eazy was living a player's lifestyle, his death seemed to come out of nowhere. "It was a shock to everybody, " says Steffon, a former cohost of the syndicated video show Pump It Up and an MC signed to Ruthless Records. "About a week before he went into the hospital, I was at his house and he was the same ol' E. We was just chillin", bumpin" tunes, smokin" weed, talkin" about business."

According to his bodyguards, Eazy was having cold symptoms and some difficulty breathing as early as mid-January but avoided seeing a doctor. "He"d had bronchitis off and on since he was a kid, " says Big Man. "So it wasn"t completely new." But Eazy's breathing became increasingly strained, and on Thursday, February 16, Jacob T. and Big Man took him to the emergency room of Norwalk Community Hospital.

"He sounded worse than I"d ever heard him, " says Big Man, "but he wouldn"t have gone if it were up to him. We practically had to force him to go." Eazy was admitted for a breathing problem and released on February 19. After leaving the hospital, he went home to Topanga Canyon, where he rested, trying to get over what everyone assumed was bronchitis-related asthma.

"That Thursday, we slept over at his house, " says Jacob. "Eazy was still wheezing and short of breath. He had an appointment with his doctor the next day." On Friday, February 24, Eazy-E was admitted to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. Under the alias Eric Lollis, Eazy stayed in room 5105, where he was given antibiotics for an infection in his lungs.

"He was smaller because his appetite had decreased. But there were no lesions or dementia. None of the other things you associate with AIDS, " says Charms Henry, Eazy's former personal assistant and longtime friend. "I know because I lost an uncle to it last year." In the hospital, Eazy wore black Calvin Klein long underwear and sometimes a gown to cover his upper body. His mom was bringing him home-cooked food and fresh fruit. He had a radio but spent most of the time watching television.

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Eazy was diagnosed with AIDS March 1. "He told me it wasn't fair, " says Henry, her voice tense with emotion. "That he didn't want to die. He said he wouldn't care if he didn't have a dime; he said he wouldn't care what anybody said, if he could just drop the top on his car and ride up the coast one more time."

"She told you, right?" is how Eazy-E told Big Man and Jacob T. that he was dying of AIDS. The "she" was his soon-to-be wife, Tomica, who had been keeping a bedside vigil since Eazy was hospitalized. Eazy was scheduled for surgery the next day, March 15, so that excess fluid could be drained from his lungs. Amid concern that he might not survive the surgery, he married Tomica Woods. Woods and her daughter subsequently tested negative for HIV, though they may not be out of danger, as the virus sometimes takes months to show up in tests.

Eazy recited his wedding vows at approximately 9:30 p.m. on March 14. He was unable to stand. His parents, Kathie (a grade school administrator) and Richard Wright (a retired postal worker), were in attendance, as were his sister and brother, Patricia and Kenneth. The same night Eazy reportedly signed a will naming attorney Sweeney and Tomica Woods cotrustees of his estate. The surgery, however, never happened. Shortly after dawn, Eazy was transferred to the hospital's intensive care unit. There he was hooked up to life support.

"I was told that they couldn't drain his lungs because he was too weak, " says Jacob. From that point on, Eazy remained in critical condition. Charms Henry saw him on March 24, two days before he died. "I was talking to him but he didn't respond, " she says. "It looked as if he was asleep. It was the first time he looked comfortable in a while. He looked peaceful."

Less than 24 hours after Eric Wright's death, war broke out over his estate. Mike Klein, Ruthless's director of business affairs, filed a \$5 million lawsuit charging that Tomica Woods and Ron Sweeney, who became Eazy's attorney in January 1995, wrongfully claimed ownership of Ruthless. In a motion filed March 27 in L.A. Superior Court, Klein claimed to own 50 percent of the label, per an agreement signed with Eazy in 1992. Klein says he fired



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More than one of Eazy's ex-girlfriends have expressed concern over whether their kids will continue to be provided for. "I'm not some groupie tryin' to jump in for money," says Tracy Jernagin, owner of a music production company and the mother of Eazy's four-year-old daughter, Erin Wright—who has since retained a lawyer to assure that her child's interests are protected. "Eric was very generous and loving toward his daughter. I know he wanted her provided for."

Regardless of who inherits his ample fortune (estimated at \$35 million), Eazy-E deserves props for many things: for pioneering some of the funkier hardcore music ever made; for opening people's eyes to how bad things have gotten in urban America; for being a successful entrepreneur; for being one of the first people to tell cops to fuck off in song.

But since his death, the fact that stands out more than any other is that his music unabashedly glorified the lifestyle that ended up killing him. "Feel a little gust of wind / And I'm jettin'," he rapped in "Straight Outta Compton." "But leave a memory no one'll be forgettin' / So what about that bitch who got shot? / Fuck her / You think I give a damn about a bitch? / I ain't a sucker / This is the autobiography of the E / And if you ever fuck with me you'll get taken." Well, E got taken. The truth is, hip hop's attitude of invincibility is a joke in the face of the AIDS virus.

"When Magic got it, people thought about it for a minute," says former N.W.A. member DJ Yella. "But everybody knew Eric; he's right there in the streets. His dying from AIDS has got a lot of people thinking, 'Now that's close, it can't get no closer but me getting it.'" Only days after Eazy passed, a young street vendor stood on the corner of Florence and Crenshaw Boulevards in South-Central Los Angeles selling T-shirts. Two weeks ago they might have borne messages like FREE OJ or BITCHES AIN'T SHIT. Now the shirts say in big black letters: AIDS IS RUTHLESS. SO TAKE IT EAZY. RIP 3/26/95

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Thousands Flock to Funeral for Eazy-E; Music: Overflow crowd is drawn to "gangsta" rap star's service. Eulogy notes his contributions but warns of danger of AIDS, which killed the rapper.

The Times Mirror Company, Los Angeles Times - April 08, 1995, Saturday, Home Edition

SECTION: METRO; PAGE: B-1

Frank B. Williams; Times Staff Writer

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The steady stream of cars, some of them blasting the booming bass guitar and screeching adolescent voice that made him famous, kept rolling slowly down Harvard Boulevard near the First African Methodist Episcopal Church during a funeral Friday for rapper and AIDS casualty Eazy-E.

A mix of more than 3,000 fans, mothers with their children, longtime friends, casual associates, gang members sporting their colors and record industry insiders watched as church officials and family members wheeled in a gold coffin layered with white roses and lilacs. The entrance line swirled nearly around the corner as security officials pushed back more than a thousand onlookers.

Many of the people who showed up at the service were teen-agers skipping school, hoping to catch a piece of history or get a glimpse of the celebrity spectacle as "gangsta" rap's 31-year-old godfather, whose real name was Eric Wright, was remembered.

Wright, a co-founder of the influential Compton rap group N.W.A., died of AIDS on March 26. In the late 1980s, N.W.A. won acclaim for painting rap's most evocative and fierce portraits of life in Los Angeles at street level.

Fans Brandy Hernandez and Danny Zaragoza, 17-year-old seniors at Santa Ana High School, drove for an hour Friday morning to watch the service.

"His death really scared me," said Hernandez, uneasily shifting her feet from side to side. "But I

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hope it will make more young people think about what they are doing out there."

In eulogizing Wright, the Rev. Cecil Murray waxed poignant and frank, urging the jammed church to rejoice in Wright's life but learn lessons from the way he died. While praising Wright's contributions to anti-gang efforts in Compton and throughout Los Angeles, Murray sent a message to those young people who feel invulnerable to AIDS.

"I know a little blackbird that sings," Murray said, pointing his finger at the coffin. "And his lyrics are, "I want you to live. I want you to be careful. I want you to slow down." "

In the audience, rapper Hutch (Gregory Hutchinson) of Above The Law, one of the best-known rap groups on Wright's Ruthless Records label, placed his head in his hands as the choir sang "Rough Side of the Mountain." Later in the service, Hutchinson's manager, Greg Cross, spoke of Wright's contributions.

"People will talk and say evil and vicious things," Cross told the crowd. "But your (Wright's) legacy will survive in a type of music that promoted reality and awareness and also by how you paved the way for brothers in the "hood with your creative aspirations."

Charise Henry, who was Wright's personal assistant for four years, expressed her sadness through poetry.

"We ought to recognize our own fragility no matter how hard-core we are," said Henry, standing above photos of Wright, including a life-sized image.

\*

Calling Wright "Compton's favorite son," Compton Mayor Omar Bradley, who two years ago berated Wright and his associates for portraying black life and Compton in a derogatory manner, declared Friday to be "Eazy-E Day" in the city.

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"Eric made Compton famous not just in California, but all over the world," Bradley said while reading the proclamation from the Compton City Council. "I recognize Eazy as a young man who grew up in the streets of Compton--and brothers and sisters, we know it's not "easy" growing up in Compton."

Of the five former members of the once-world-famous N.W.A., only DJ Yella (Antoine Carraby) was present as a pallbearer in the services. Organizers did not know if two others--Dr. Dre (Andre Young) and Ice Cube (O'shea Jackson)--were in attendance. Cross said the fifth member, MC Ren (Lorenzo Patterson), did not want to attend.

"Ren just didn't want to see Eazy like this," Cross said.

The fate of Wright's record company is up in the air. Since his death, squabbles have erupted between his new wife, Tomica Wood, and the former director of business affairs at Ruthless, Mike Klein. Klein filed a lawsuit last week claiming that he owns 50% of the company. Wood maintains that she is the sole owner.

Industry insiders said the company is worth around \$10 million, including its assets and a double CD compilation finished by Wright before his death. An April 14 Superior Court hearing is expected to send the once profitable company into a conservatorship until a judge can decide its fate.

After the service, as some mourners headed to the cemetery for Wright's burial, Rosa Allen, 23, stood on the curb amid the TV cameras and groupies taking in the scene. Allen, who had walked to the service from her house nearby, said the death of Wright--who fathered seven children by six women--was an urgent message to everyone, but especially young girls.

"A lot of these girls are not thinking about what they are doing," Allen said, running her hands through her long braids. "Their heads aren't on straight when they try and sleep with these celebrities. There's more to life than a one-night stand. They have their whole lives ahead of them."

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Outside the church, as the crowd began to disperse, 19-year-old Michelle Thompson held a small circle of other young black women captive with words of caution.

"I'm 19 years old and HIV-positive and I don't know if I will ever make it to 21," said Thompson, who had flown from her home in Houston to attend the funeral. "It feels like somebody reached down inside my chest and grabbed my heart out. But I tell people all the time: Don't have sympathy for me, because that makes me feel sorry for myself. Just pray for me. Just pray for me."

On March 15, Eric "Eazy-E" Wright lay in the intensive care unit of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He was 31 years old and fighting for his life. Heavily sedated, Eazy-E had a respirator tube running down his throat to help him breathe. In the cramped, fluorescent-lit room, a few close friends and Tomica Woods-his new wife and the mother of his youngest son-gathered around his bed.

"We told him we loved him, " says Jacob T., a six-foot-three, 300-pound Samoan, one of Eazy's longtime twin bodyguards. He and his brother, John T., were with Eazy through most of his last days. "But he couldn't talk. Then we said, "If you can hear us, just squeeze our hand." He did."

Big Man (a.k.a. Mark Rucker), who grew up with Eazy in Compton, removed a gold ring his wife had given him on their 10th anniversary. He slipped it on Eazy's index finger. "I told him, "I want you to give this back to me when you get out of here." " But Eazy never got out. His immune system had become too weak to fight off the infection that was ravaging his lungs.

About a week later, Eric Wright fell unconscious and remained so until he died on March 26, 1995, at 6:35 p.m., from AIDS-related pneumonia.

The announcement that Eazy had AIDS sent shock waves throughout the hip hop nation. Fans, friends, even journalists wept openly on March 16 as his attorney, Ron Sweeney, read a statement from his client outside the old Motown building in Hollywood. The founder of N.W.A,

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the man who popularized gangsta rap worldwide, was suddenly thrust into the role of AIDS educator: "I would like to turn my own problem into something good that will reach out to all my homeboys," Eazy said through Sweeney. "I want to save their asses before it's too late. I'm not looking to blame anyone except myself."

Though Eazy didn't say (and perhaps didn't know) how he contracted the virus, he implied that it was through unprotected sex with women. "I have seven children by six different mothers," said the statement. "Maybe success was too good to me." At the Beat, L.A.'s KKBT-FM, where Eazy had hosted a show every Saturday, the phone rang. It was Snoop Doggy Dogg, who, in a call filled with long, pregnant silences, said he was praying for Eazy. The next day Ice Cube phoned in.

"Me and Eric worked out our differences," said Cube. "I had just seen him in New York, and we talked for a long time. We was laughing and kickin' it about how N.W.A should get back together. I'm just waiting for a call that says he's cool enough for me to go to the hospital and check him out...and let him know that he's still the homie, when it comes to me."

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DJ Yella speaks out on the rise and fall of hardcore

By Eugene Bowen

Daily Arts Writer

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The stormy breakup of Compton's Niggaz with Attitude (NWA) has been the stuff of rap music legend. Alleged mismanagement and unscrupulous actions by member Eazy-E led then-members Ice Cube and Dr. Dre to leave the group in '89 and late '91, respectively. These three members' constant heckling of each other was as public as it was potent. Yet throughout this time, Antoine Carraby -- better known as the light-skinned DJ Yella -- had remained virtually silent. Until now.

Yella released his first solo album ever on March 26 ("One Mo Nigga Ta Go," Scotti Bros./Street Life Records), a tribute to the late Eazy-E on the one-year anniversary of the rapper's AID-related death. With this release, Yella, always seen as NWA's quietest member, has begun to speak out, offering a fresh perspective on the rise and fall of hardcore rap's most influential group of yesteryear.

"The reason behind the breakup was simple: Egos started getting in the way," DJ Yella said. "NWA started making too much money, so everyone wanted more money. Eazy made more money 'cause he owned the label NWA was on (Ruthless Records) and had other groups under him making money. But everyone didn't see it that way."

Already friends from DJ-ing at the same club in L.A. for awhile, Yella's and Dr. Dre's first performance experience was with the Wrecking Crew. "But we weren't getting paid. So we were looking for a way out. And Dre already knew Eazy. So we waited for the right time and left the Wrecking Crew to start NWA in '86. Originally, there was six of us in NWA -- me, MC Ren, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Eazy-E and Arabian Prince. But Prince was around for only the first couple of songs; he was just doing his own stuff, I guess. He dropped out a little after we took the picture for the 'Straight Outta Compton' album.

"Ruthless Records started right at NWA. I really had nothing to do with the business side; that was Eazy's territory. It was his money that started it. Ren was one of the best rappers in NWA, on account of his strong voice. He wasn't a producer, though. Cube was just a writer; he just happened to write some of Eazy's first few songs.

"NWA was really about street music. I don't think NWA started West Coast, but I think we made the name for it. We was rapping about what we lived around, saw and what could happen. We was talking about real stuff in the ghetto, and that ghetto can be any ghetto, not just Compton ... Nothing phony; we just rapping about real living. We never changed in that respect, even when we began to cross over.

## Tribute To Eazy-E

Written by Staff ID9

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"Our music started crossing over, I think, when MTV banned our `Straight Outta Compton" video (in "88). Records sales took off with no radio play, no nothing. It was a trip because when we toured back in "89, 80 percent of the crowd was white. It shocked us, but back then the only way for a record to go gold or platinum was if it crossed over ... We had nothing against nobody. We wasn't racist or nothing like that. I guess they was buying our records "cause it was stuff they never heard about. They wanted to know about Compton. Our music opened their eyes to the ghetto."

Their music also opened the NWA members' eyes to the threat of censorship. With the release of their "Fuck the Police" single back in "91, NWA earned the wrath of everyone from the FBI to United States Representatives. "We based this song on us, on how police were in the ghetto," Yella said. "We didn't know how the police in the suburbs were, but in the ghetto that's how they treat you. They treat you like nothing, ya know, just "cause they got a badge or something."

"We was just making a song about what police do all the time: Stop you for nothing, have you outside of the car sitting on the curb, harassing you just because you're black, dress a certain way, whatever. One time or another you wanted to say `fuck the police" for some reason. Not all cops are bad, but a few bad ones make everyone look at police in a bad way."

"We expected a little flack for `Fuck the Police," but not as much as we got. Concert places were kind of scared of us, as if we were causing riots. I don't know why; nothing ever happened on our tours. Nothing. No fights or anything. But we agreed to not perform that song at concerts."

Looking back at the start of NWA, Yella can't help but to be surprised himself by how such strong love can turn into such livid anger. "Dre and I was like brothers. We was tight, real tight," Yella said. "Them first few years we was all like family. Even when Cube left, the rest of us was like family ... When he left, we all talked about him, even Dre. That's when all those albums came out. Then Dre left and did an album with Cube."

"I remember when Dre told me he was leaving NWA and invited me to leave with him. I told him I'd get back with him. To this day I haven't gotten back with him to tell him no or yes. Eazy hadn't cheated me out of anything; I can't get mad at Eric just "cause Dre's mad at him. I just stayed neutral. I was still with Eazy, but I never was in the videos where he dissed Dre either."

## Tribute To Eazy-E

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Allegations of Eric "Eazy-E" Wright's swindling money from the other NWA members have always run rampant. Yella fights this, saying, "I know he didn't cheat nobody. He never cheated me. Put it like this: You living in a million-dollar house; Eazy's living in a \$2 million house. How can he be cheating you if you living in a million-dollar house? I mean, Eazy was supposed to make more money. He owned the label NWA was on, and he had other acts making money on his label, too."

DJ Yella truly believes that after the first couple of albums were released, the tension between the different members had ended. "But the press kept talking about it and playing it out.

"After Dre left, MC Ren sorta drifted off on his own some time in '92. By this time we didn't think about an NWA album anymore. We just concentrated on Eazy's next solo album. Me and Eric was going to do an another album, but then he died.

"I found out the night before the press conference about Eazy (testing HIV positive). In fact, that statement they read, he didn't even write. He was already on the machine by then. A buddy of ours, Big Man, told me everything. None of us (former NWA members) met up even then. We each saw Eric at different times, and MC Ren never showed up. After that his wife wouldn't let anyone else see him. That was messed up.

"I was the only (NWA member) at Eric's funeral. The excuse I heard from Cube was he was out of town, but they have planes flying all the time. As for the other two, I haven't the slightest idea. It seems to me that they would be there. I'm glad I was there from day one to the last day. Wherever he is, he can know I was down with him even through the tough times. Them, I know they have regrets."

As for rumors about making an NWA reunion video, Yella comments, "I heard about it, but no one has yet to talk to me. Now that Dre's left Death Row, maybe we can talk about it." And anything that's done, if DJ Yella has his way, will most certainly contain a million references to the group's founder.

"When I say Ruthless Records now, it's just a name," Yella said. "Eazy was Ruthless. It seems that people's just forgetting about him, and he did so much for so many." That's why Yella demanded, successfully, that Ruthless Records allow him to produce Eazy-E's posthumous

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"Straight off Tha Streetz of Compton." And that's why, throughout his debut LP, Yella fights to keep Eric Wright's music alive.

"I wanted to do something and dedicate it all to him. Losing him was like losing an arm. I wish times when me and him were talking business we could've talked about other things. I wish we'd done more things together -- just go fishing, anything. Just spend time together."

"Thanks to <http://www.eazy-e.com/> for alot of the material posted on this page.