

Stories of a Harlem Resident

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A VOICE FROM HARLEM

The leaves fall off the tree,
Things aren't what they seem to be,
Growing up in Harlem,
Poverty is what I see.

The sky is cloudy,
Things are going rowdy,
The leaves fall off the tree,
Growing up in Harlem,
Poverty is what I see.

Seeing homelessness is so sad,
I'm doing everything to make people glad,
Why does life look so bad?
When you are black,
The world feels out of your reach,
Growing up in Harlem,
Poverty is what I see

I tried my best.
Tomorrow I will try to get some rest.

The leaves fall off the tree.

Growing up in Harlem,

Poverty is what I see.

A VOICE FROM EAST HARLEM

Walking across the street could cost me my life,

I don't want to be another black man dead at night,

Sleeping on my bed gives me relief,

I don't want to see another black woman dead at the hands of the police,

Jogging in the street is great for the mind,

I don't want to see a black man die of the hatred that someone has for them on the inside,

Going home after hours is a risk,

I don't want to see a black man die for their refusal to resist.

JOURNEYMAN

The process,
When I look behind me,
I say, what's next?
Fame and fortune are good,
But is that all you're working for?
Money, Cars, Jewelry,
It means nothing to me.

I have a dream,
To make it to the league,
You see,
When I graduate,
I have become a master of it.

Changing people's lives,
Sounds so divine,
I will try to be kind,
Goodbye.

THE BLUE MEN

BRRR! BRRR!

The lights are flashing, and the car stops,
Walking home and looking around,
Everyone is inside, and the area is quiet.

Kids are with their parents,
Coming from school or going shopping,
Surviving any way you can and going in hiding.

Finding yourself through tough times and exceeding expectations,
The faces of people who are looking to do better but are shut away,
Hearing the BRRR! BRRR! sound every day makes you feel trapped,
Get along for the ride because it will be a long one.

Stuff happens for a reason,
When a whole nation is in an uproar,
There is no ignoring it.

The sound of a police car may traumatize some people, which is something we can't be changed.
What's important here is doing what you can to change your environment.

When you see your brothers and sisters in peril,
You got to respond and step up to the plate.

The change will not arrive overnight,
But with diligence and effort, it will slowly come.

People may not like it, but it must be done when it comes.

Seeing your own people in distress and threatened strikes a chord in me and should be in you too.

STARSTRUCK

Actively aware,
Bidding boxes,
Carrying things,
Decoding the unknown,
Excel at your craft,
Find your passion,
Gone from memory,
Hungry for success,
Invite the audience,
Join the crowd,
Laugh more,
Make moves,
Never settle,
Orange peels,
Pause for a second!
Question your surroundings!
Remain calm,
Stay ready,
Tame everything,
Understand your worth,
Value the small things,
Watch out for the doubters,

Xerox it,
You are the future,
Zebra's world.

PASSION

I am annoyed by the lack of awareness,

Things I chose,

Sometimes, people are careless,

One of my favorite players is D-rose.

Life is a roller coaster,

Ignite the engine that drives,

Take the bread out of the toaster,

Got to let them know I've arrived,

Some things never die,

Striving for greatness,

It's that time,

The ball is life,

Let me fly my kite,

It's done, you can see who won.

RANDOMNESS

It's on the top of the world,
That's what I told her,
Walking down the street,
Everything's sweet,
That's weak,
I'm sleeping,
Don't reach.

So much stuff going on,
Nothing can go wrong,
He sang that song,
I said, c'mon,
That has become soft,
Criss-cross, apple sauce.

Is that Randy Moss?
That is all she wrote
See that quote?
Wash your hands with soap,
Pass me the remote,
That's the way to cope,
The other day, he said, *nope*.

The information is in that note.

Remember me in the future,
Got to have a sense of humor,
I'm a junior,
In basketball, I'm a sniper shooter.

MAKESHIFT

The energy we bring is essential,
Have to believe you're worth it,
Make a note of it,
Go to have grit,
Look at the toolkit.

It's a cool whip,
I did the splits,
Working on something is cool,
Don't follow other people's rules,
Everything is in a whirlpool.

Don't be cruel,
Shaqtin¹ a fool,
That's a good duel,
April fools.

Things tend to take a turn,
I hope that you don't get burned,
I tried to turn the curve,

¹ A comedy series showing the mistakes of basketball players.

The case is adjourned,
The grass is with fern,
What did you learn?
I know Larry Bird!

OBSERVER

I have a cold,
Everything I see is gold,
Most things are controlled,
That sneaker has been resold.

ACHIEVER

College Graduate with two degrees,
14-time scholarship winner,
Journalism award for sports writing,
Three-time dean's list recipient,
I'm just a kid from Harlem.
I overcame the odds and more,
Inspiring others is the goal,
Nothing less, nothing more.

VISIONARY

Purpose-driven, never lacking.

Power drop, next list.

People dancing, natively laughing.

Peers directing, narrating labor.

Pairings dissecting, narrowing nimbly.

Pockets damped nighttime lures.

Probing decided, neighborhood leaks.

Popping daisies, nameless liability.

Precision dagger, numerically leaving.

The process is done, and there are new labels.

Padlocking division, noteworthy life.

RISING STAR

Abrupt the status quo,
Bring excitement,
Change people's lives through positivity,
Driven to take my family out of poverty,
Exceed expectations.

Face the top dog,
Grit: doing the job regardless,
Have a heart in everything you do,
Identify weaknesses,
Jam the unfaithful.

Kindly execute,
Leave a legacy,
Make a mark,
Next up,
Overly flamboyant,
Place your bet.

Question the word,
Run it back again,
Strive for greatness,

Tall task rising above the odds,
Use my gift for good,
Watch out for me,
X marks the spot,
Young people are the future,
Zigzagging my way to success.

IMAGES

Plentiful droughts narrowing down lightly,

Power dials nabbing discs lightly,

People dancing natively, discussing lightly,

Prancing daises not dissecting lightly,

Pretty drip non-dowser lightly,

Process dome near due lightly,

Primetime delivery nice drop lightly,

Probability day never decides lightly,

Printing dice news directs lightly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Javier Sarmiento Jr is an Afro-Latino writer from Harlem in New York City. He is a graduate of Buena Vista University with a degree in Digital media. He wrote about sports and social justice topics as a staff writer for The Tack Online, Buena Vista University’s online newspaper. He is a graduate of Guttmann Community College with a degree in Liberal Arts. Sarmiento Jr won first place in the collegiate sports writing category of the Robert L. Vann Media Awards for his article “The Impact and Influence of LeBron James.” Last summer, he was selected to be a part of the NABJ’s Student Multimedia Project. He produced two articles pertaining to race in the teaching and book industries.

He is a 14-time scholarship winner, which is a Harlem record, and an award-winning writer. He is a member of NABJ (National Association for Black Journalists) and a member of NAHJ (National Association for Hispanic Journalists). His poem, a voice from Harlem, was recently awarded an Honorable mention in the rhyming poetry category in the 90th Annual Writer’s Digest Writing Competition. He has a passion for Basketball and Social justice. Becoming an NBA player, journalist, and social activist is part of his many dreams.