

15 Minutes of Fame



Bunny DeBarge



DeBarge

Recently I had the pleasure of interviewing a standout old school artist from the DeBarge family. Bunny DeBarge, now 57, with 4 kids and 13 grandkids, has recently released a book, *The Kept Ones*, regarding her and her siblings, El, Bobby, Tommy, Mark, James, Chico and Randy's, drug use and abuse, death and the pain and suffering her family has endured over the years. Ms. DeBarge who hails from Grand Rapids, Michigan and an interracial family with a White father and Black mother endured years of racial remarks in school and never even had the pleasure of meeting her father's side of the family because he was disowned when he married her mother. Moma DeBarge pretty much raised the family and when the group made it big, she was a sealed part of the deal. Ms. DeBarge was very giving of her time and here is how our Q& A went:

Q Out of the other family groups that were out at the time of DeBarge, the Sylvers, the Jacksons, or the Jets, who were you compared to the most?

A We were most compared to the Jacksons.

Q Did your family agree with James and Janet (Jackson) getting married?

A No, we did not agree but we didn't even know. We didn't know they were that close and we didn't know they had gotten married. We felt they were both too young and we knew James had a drug problem.

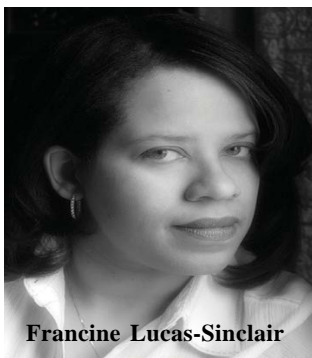
15 Minutes Of FAME

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Nobody knows the story better than 34-year-old Francine Lucas-Sinclair.

Lucas-Sinclair is the daughter of the now well-known drug lord Frank Lucas. Her story has been in hiding for the past 30 years, but with the recent release of "American Gangster," she found this to be the perfect time to begin her journey to help others like her.

Yellow Brick Roads is a program created by Lucas-Sinclair to provide support to children of incarcerated parents. The program was begun with little research; however Lucas-Sinclair did not need much outside her own experience. The life of Francine Lucas-Sinclair was a glamorous one, leading up to a memorable morning in 1975. When police charged into their Atlanta home, her mother and her father were both arrested and arrested once again some time later after their release. The unstable upbringing she knew growing up was her reason for starting the Yellow Brick Roads organization. "I only have to think of how many kids are crying them of them have the feeling of being half dead and half alive, how many of them have to make up stories about their parents to tell people," said Lucas-Sinclair on the Yellow Brick Road Web site. "Most professionals can only imagine, but I really know." It is expected that by the year 2058 there will be more people in this country incarcerated than there will be not incarcerated.



Francine Lucas-Sinclair

The scary part is that with the rate of population growth, more and more children placed in foster homes and on the streets will have to fend for themselves in their parents' absence.

Initiatives such as this one developed to support these "parentless" children will become more and more important as the years progress, especially as we get closer to the 2058 statistic.

It is highly admirable for someone who came from such a disturbing and unstable childhood to want to reach out and help others. It completely disregards the notion that children who are brought up in these environments will always stay in them. Lucas-Sinclair is now married with children, and obviously has no desire to raise her children the way she was raised. As a child, she never realized that her Prada mink coat and \$10,000 FAO Swartz train set were bought with drug money. As a child you don't care. All you see is the toys. As an adult, she has taken the responsibility to teach children that down isn't the way to go in these situations. You can always go up.

I had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Lucas-Sinclair and asked the following questions:

Jenny: What would make you catch a case?

Ms. Lucas-Sinclair: I'm not familiar with that terminology?

Jenny: What could happen in your life that would make you do something to go to prison?

Ms. Lucas-Sinclair: If anyone did anything to my children I would probably just lose it! You can never say never because there is so much going on.

Jenny: What would you say to all of the inmates reading this article?

Ms. Lucas-Sinclair: There is a reason for everything. Life is not fair. Even though you're going through what you are going through – there is a plan. I don't believe god is so cruel that there is not a reason for your struggle. This time in your life is for a reason.

Jenny: do you have any words of encouragement for inmates?

Ms. Lucas-Sinclair: For the men & women who are being release – before you do anything – think about your kids. Fight tooth and nail to stay free. Do whatever is necessary; pick up cans, wash cars, sweep floors, etc to stay at home with your children. Remember that your children have been traumatized already by your incarceration. While you are still incarcerated and have time on your hands, try to read the book – Think and Grow Rich by Dennis Kimbrow (A Black Choice). This is the version that is needed to be read. (*You can purchase this book through the Prisonworld Marketplace*)

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Ready for the World - often ignored in modern retrospectives of 80's music, during 1985-1988 there were few acts that were bigger than Ready For the World. Their Jheri curl look made them the young heartthrobs of R&B/Pop music, and their series of hit dance cuts and ballads, were absolutely infectious.

Formed in the early 80's in Flint, Michigan by singer/songwriter Melvin Riley along with Gordon Strozier, John Eaton, Willie Triplett, Gerald Valentine and Gregory Potts, Ready for the World scored sizeable hits with the first two singles, the ballads "Tonight" and "Deep Inside Your Love." But it was their third single, the magnificent Prince-sounding electronic dance tune "Oh Sheila," that moved the group to the top of the Pop and Soul charts. The song became one of the year's biggest pop hits.

Willie Triplett of Ready for the World was gracious enough to sit down with me for an interview. He and his wife live about five minutes away. Yes, he and my husband are first cousins. They grew up very close. If you look back on some of their album's you will see Rufus' name as songwriter. Here's a little about the group and my interview:

Do you see Ready for the World as pioneers? I don't but other people do. We've heard that a lot from people in the industry and "fans".

What do you most want to be remembered for? We haven't accomplished this yet but we're working on it. I want most to be remembered for AUTHENTICITY. If anything, that is what I would like to be remembered for.

What's the craziest thing a female has done to get the group's attention? We were at Disneyland performing across the water and a female jumped in the water to get to us. You had electricity going throughout with the lights and all and that was kinda crazy.

Have any of the members had any run-ins with the law? Absolutely! We've all had run-ins with the law. We've had issues, sometimes domestic; I'm just going to be real with it. Sometimes whether it be tinted windows, or suspended licenses or whatever the case may be. We go thru the normal aspects of living and being citizens.

What about drug use. Did that play apart in any of the group's lives? Nah, not at all. So far no member has been indicted, caught or accused or any wrong doing drug wise.

What keeps you grounded? The overall love of the craft.

Is there a criminal element in the music business? I believe so. Again, I'm just going to keep it real. It can be cutthroat at times, unnecessarily. I think that we can all be in this industry and make money. It doesn't have to be cutthroat, people stabbing each other in the back for whatever reason. In the beginning when we first started out, there was a lock code on the industry from managers, to labels to radio stations, but I feel that has changed and the artist has gained a lot more control. Even though that element still exists, the artist has gained a lot more control.

What would you say is the biggest myth about being in the music business? The biggest myth is that you don't have to work for it. Of course you have those one hit wonders. The artists don't make themselves. It takes a whole background of people to make the artist big. So the biggest myth that the artist did it by themselves is bull. And I don't care who you are, it's not happening.

Do all of the members have a college background or skills to fall back on? I think all of the members have skills to fall back on. Every member does not have a college background. Only a few of us have had some college. I don't think it's necessary in this society to always have a college background. I think if you have the wherewithal and the will to go out and get your hustle on, I think that you can succeed in this society.

With all of what you are seeing going on with young Black men, what do you think of the criminal justice system? I think it needs to be totally revamped. I know that our young guys need guidance but they don't all need to be thrown in jail and the key thrown away. So it definitely needs to be revamped and law enforcement needs to refocus on how they treat us.

What words of encouragement can you give to all of the prisoners reading this article? I think that regardless of what your situation is you have to concentrate on your future. Whether that be five years away or ten years away, concentrate and start rebuilding yourself. If you do that you can handle anything that comes your way. Put God first; believe in yourself and then everything else.

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Mint Condition-For nearly two decades, they are more than an average group or band....they become, in fact, Mint Condition. After five successful studio albums, over a dozen hit singles, multiple world tours, the band remains just as popular as ever. Every member of the band, including keyboardists Lawrence El and Keri Lewis, guitarist O'Dell and keyboardist/saxophonist Jeffrey, came of age in the Twin Cities (St. Paul & Minneapolis) and were inspired by Prince's electrifying hybrid of funk, soul and pop (now known as "The Minneapolis Sound,"). The young men knew of one another peripherally, but the collaborations didn't fall into place until they united under Central High School's performing arts program; O'Dell and Stokley, who had a steel drum class together, absorbed the musicians after practicing sessions in Stokley's home basement. "There was a performing arts class that we were all in," says Lawrence of that fertile period. "A lot of singers around town would hire musicians and we ended up playing in gigs together as the backing band. It happened so often that eventually, we decided to just do it all ourselves." And if the sudden implosion of record labels weren't enough of a change, another one loomed on the horizon; in 2001, two years after...Aquarium's release, Keri Lewis departed from the band to produce and tour with his future wife, Toni Braxton; according to his band mates, the split was an amicable one. "We talk on the phone at least once a month and we run into him every now and then.

15 Minutes of Fame (Part 2)

Stokley is a singer/songwriter and plays drums for the band. Here's how our interview went:

Jenny : I'm going to ask you the same questions that I asked Willie from Ready for the World.

Stokley: Oh really, why?

Jenny: Because I am going to put it up like a Battle of the Bands.

Do you see Mint Condition as pioneers? I'm not sure. Maybe some people see us as new pioneers. Our sound is just a culmination of all of the groups we were inspired by; bands and vocal groups. I guess the way that we package it some people consider it new. We continue to be inspired and do new things such as E-Life, our new album.

What do you most want to be remembered for?

Being true to yourself no matter what the obstacles. There are so many things I could say but staying true to self is very important. People are always going to have their comments and feel you should do things this way or that way. But as long as it is true to us, then we go with it.

What's the craziest thing a female has done to get the group's attention?

There have been a few things. Of course you have your preverbal throwing the undergarments on stage. And then you get the extreme of somebody sending the keys to their house with the code to the alarm system being my birth date and their birth date. That's pretty wild. There are so many examples but that's one of the wildest to me.

Have any of the members had any run-ins with the law? I'm sure being a Black man in America, who hadn't, hell? I mean hey, I'm just being real.

What about drug use. Did that play apart in any of the group's lives? I'm sure all of us have experimented when we were younger. You gotta climb knuckle head hill. I lived 2 blocks right around the corner from the hood. The area I lived in was pretty cool but literally a block away was mess. I don't know how any of us made it out. Rick the bass player is from the South Side of Chicago and you know what that's about. Just by the grace of God and after school programs we made it out. I can understand young cats coming up today that have these negative influences around and getting into trouble because of nothing to do. It is important to give them something to do.

What keeps you grounded? Family. Living in the Midwest is a grounding experience. I always say that we work the hoopla but we don't live it. We come home, regroup, re-energize and then head out again, North, South, East, West, overseas, wherever we have to go. Family and friends keep it real and we can be ourselves. I would hate to have to walk around with a bodyguard. I enjoy the freedom that we have living here.

Is there a criminal element in the music business? I think so. Any time there is that type of money generated in anything, not only music, I'm talking about government as well, there's always going to be something there. You deal a lot on a cash basis, payola is still going on and so yes I believe that you will always have some type of criminal element, not just Mafioso.

What would you say is the biggest myth about being in the music business? Once you get in and get signed you're rich and it's the end of your problems. That is not the case like most people think. Most young people coming thru that's what they see. It's a lot of hard work and if you have any type of success, that's when the work really begins. You think getting in is hard? Staying in is even rougher.

Do all of the members have a college background or skills to fall back on? Some of us. Lawrence is back in school studying Physics. Jeffrey, the keyboard player, just got his degree in Criminal Justice. I'm still trying to put the nail and coffin on some of these languages, mainly Spanish. We're all always into something.

With all of what you are seeing going on with young Black men, what do you think of the criminal justice system? From the little bit that I do know, some of us know that it is unfair. It's not balanced and it all basically comes down to money. Everybody trying to get paid. All of these quotas being met. I got stopped the other day. I really don't know why I got stopped. He said it was something different but he really couldn't explain to me what it really was. So after he ran my license and saw that I was clean, no issue existed. There is a lot of unfair things that goes on. It's jacked up but the system has some deep problems going on.

What words of encouragement can you give to all of the prisoners reading this article? Keep ya head up. Don't give up. Don't just play cards and lift weights. Use the time wisely. It's a lot of great examples that have come out of prison. I would say use that example of like a Malcolm X or someone like that. There are many others but use the time that you have to reflect. There are many that are in there that are innocent. Stay strong. I've never been to prison and ain't looking to go. From what I've heard it ain't really no place to be. You have to live by a different code. Stay strong.

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