

Duane "D.O." Gibson

# 1. defy the odds

*"The road was rough but we aren't giving up  
Cuz' we came so far  
And we ain't going stop 'til we get to the top and  
Defy the Odds"*  
- "Defy the Odds"

It was supposed to be one of the best concerts we had ever done, but it looked like it wasn't going to happen. If it went wrong, we would be late and would miss our opportunity, but we weren't going to let that happen. We had come too far to give up. After all, we had travelled half way around the world to get here.

We were in Tokyo, Japan, about to kick off the first show of our Asian tour.

It was just Byram and me. Byram, better known as Slakah the Beatchild, is the other half of our duo Art of Fresh.

We had left on Friday evening and arrived the next evening. After the thirteen-hour flight, we spent another hour going through customs and getting our luggage. Then it took us over two hours to travel into the city from the airport.

As soon as we arrived at our hotel, we threw our luggage on our beds and went out on the street to look for a cab.

I kept saying to myself, *We can't miss this show! We can't miss this show!*

The directions seemed simple. As soon as we arrived at the subway station, we had to look for a Macdonald's. The club we were performing at was right around the corner from it.

When we arrived at the station, we knew we were in trouble. We found out that Shibuya isn't any old subway station; it is one of the biggest in the world! It has lots of entrances and exits, and on top of that, I'd never seen so many people at one place in my life. It was also raining, and umbrellas were poking us in the face.

Finding a Macdonald's wasn't hard. We saw one as soon as we hit the street. The problem is we saw at least four of them! Each in a different direction. We were lost.

We tried asking people for help, but no one we approached spoke English. We tried using our hands to describe where we were going, but our game of charades didn't work. We both started thinking, *We **are** going to miss it!*

Eventually we found a pay phone and called the club. We spoke to the promoter and he met us and led us to our destination, but not before

Duane "D.O." Gibson

laughing at how lost we were. As we entered the club, we saw the host was on stage speaking to the crowd. The only thing we could understand was "Art of Fresh"!

Showtime.

Once the show was finished, we each breathed a sigh of relief. We did it. We made it.

Now the challenging part. We were back at the subway station trying to find our way back to the hotel!

*"It was an afterthought, nobody gave him a chance  
Nobody gave him a hand...so he made up a plan  
Now watch they waving their hands"*  
- "Defy the Odds"

Performing in Japan was the moment I felt I had made it as a rapper. It was always my goal to perform internationally. Tokyo seemed like a world away from the places I grew up, especially from the small town where I was born.

That was Watrous, Saskatchewan, population 1,808. Not exactly a hotbed for rappers. A few years later we moved to Toronto, but that didn't last long. By the time I was set to start school, we moved once again, this time to Stratford, Ontario, aka the place where Justin Bieber is from. At the time, it didn't matter that I was from a small town;

there were only a handful of rappers in the whole country.

I've been a professional rapper for over ten years now. I've had a chance to tour the world, sign autographs, and wake up every morning doing something I love. Along the way I've had a chance to make music videos that have played on MuchMusic, hear my music on the radio, and set a Guinness World Record.

In order for me to achieve my dreams, I had to defy the odds. That's what D.O. stands for: *Defy the Odds*.

To *Defy the Odds* means that even when the chances are slim and people tell you that you can't achieve your dream, you stick to it and battle your way through any and all challenges.

For me, becoming a rapper and achieving my dreams seemed unlikely. The odds definitely weren't in my favour. At the time there were only two or three rappers in Canada who had record deals and made a living from rapping. That made my chances one in ten million! There was a greater chance of me winning the lottery than becoming a rapper; a greater chance of being struck by lightning; a greater chance of the Toronto Maple Leafs winning the Stanley Cup! (Sorry, I'm a Montreal Canadiens fan.)

No matter what your dream is, you will face challenges along the way. While I went on to

## Duane “D.O.” Gibson

perform in Tokyo that night, there were a lot of challenges even just getting there.

The reason this book is called *Stay Driven* is because that is what you have to do in order to *Defy the Odds* and achieve your dreams.

Over the last ten years I have had the chance to live my dream. In the process, I’ve also had the chance to speak at schools to youth about overcoming challenges and reaching goals. *Stay Driven* is designed to help you in the journey to pursuing your dreams.

### *Move the Crowd*

I knew I wanted to be a rapper when I attended my first concert.

My dad had surprised me with two tickets to the DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince concert. At the time, The Fresh Prince was my favourite rapper. I didn’t know then that he would go on to become one of the biggest movie stars of all time using his real name – you may know him better as Will Smith. The first song I heard from the group was “Parents Just Don’t Understand.” I had seen the video play on MuchMusic and it caught my attention. The video was funny and I could relate to it – what kid doesn’t feel like their parents don’t understand sometimes? I saved up my allowance to buy their album.

I had never been to a rap concert, so I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that I was excited. So excited that the long wait to get in didn't bother me. We must have waited in line for two hours. When the doors finally opened and we walked in, I felt like my head was going to explode. The music was so loud. The bass from the speakers shook the building. I covered my ears at first, but then I started bobbing my head.

It took awhile for me to get used to the loud music, but once I did, I no longer wanted to stand in the back with my dad – I wanted to get right into the action! Being a kid, I was able to cut through the crowd and make my way to the front for a better view. As I looked around, I could see everyone was enjoying the show. The only time I didn't stare at the stage was when I was studying the cool dance moves people around me were doing.

That's when I thought to myself, *Just imagine if one day I could be on stage with the microphone in my hand...*

I thought being a rap star would be the coolest job in the world, right up there with playing basketball in the NBA or being a wrestler in the WWE, the other two dreams I had at the time.

Duane "D.O." Gibson

### *Three Types of Dreamers*

From speaking to hundreds of thousands of youth, I find that most of them fit into three categories of dreamers:

The first type are the ones who dream big and have a lot of confidence. They know what they want and will work hard to get it. I get inspired when I see youth with this type of drive. When these dreamers become successful, people often say, "I always knew you were going to do it."

The second type of dreamers are afraid to share their dreams. They have high hopes, but usually don't take the steps because they're shy and aren't sure if they can achieve their dreams.

Finally, you have the third type of dreamers. They don't have much confidence in themselves. They set the bar low and, even worse, they tend to give up early. Many times I've seen elementary students who feel like their dreams are out of reach. It disappoints me when someone gives up dreaming at a young age. They don't see that there are so many possibilities and opportunities to explore.

There are moments I've felt like each type of dreamer. Growing up, there were times I had a lot of confidence in myself and was proud to let the world know my dreams. But more often I fit into the second category: I knew what I wanted to do, but I had trouble standing up and letting

people know. This wasn't just as a kid, but even when I was an adult.

Once Ivan Berry came to speak to our class while I was in university. Berry was well known as a top record executive. He had a label that focused on rap music and had discovered, and worked with, most of the top rappers in the country. It could have been an opportunity for me to strut my stuff, especially at one point in his talk when he asked if there were any rappers or singers in the class. One student not only stood up, but also came to the front of the class and started freestyling. That student wasn't me. On top of that, the kid was really good. My friend nudged me to go up, but I kept my head low and didn't do it. I was unsure of myself.

As a result, sometimes I slipped into the third type – I wasn't sure if I could make it. At these times, I would put down my pen and rap book and pick up the video game controller. I figured there was no point; I wasn't going to “make it” anyways.

One thing that I've learned is that sometimes the person who appears confident is actually sometimes unsure of themselves. For performers, it's called stage fright. Even Michael Jackson, one of the greatest singers and performers ever, had stage fright later in his career. Most singers, rappers, and athletes do. You wouldn't think that

## Duane "D.O." Gibson

if you were really talented that you would be nervous. The reason that many of them become great is because they use it to their advantage. It motivates them to practice more and to become more focused, which helps them rise to the occasion and work at their best.

There will always obstacles that will challenge you. Growing up can be tough, and it takes courage to see beyond your current situation and dream of the life you want to live.

Looking back, there were three main challenges that stood in the way of me defying the odds:

The first challenge was where I was from – a small town.

*“From a small town always had big dreams,  
One day you’ll see me on a TV screen”*  
- “Small Town”

I used to think that I needed to be from a big city in the United States to be a rapper. Not just any city, I thought I had to be from New York City, or live there at least. I thought that’s where stars were discovered, not in Canada, and definitely not from a small town in Canada. At the time, it was partly true. All of the major record labels were based in New York City. Most rappers were from New York and, if not, likely from Los Angeles. There weren’t too many other places producing big rap acts.

Nowadays that has changed, largely because of the Internet and YouTube. Now it doesn't matter where you're from, you can be seen and heard all around the world from your living room.

Back then I thought being from Canada was going to hold me back. I didn't rap about where I was from because I didn't want people to know. I thought sounding Canadian was a bad thing. Now I realize that being from Canada was, and is, actually an advantage. It gave me a unique story to tell since my experiences are different from most rappers.

I've had a chance to visit many countries in the world, and I'm proud to call Canada my home. Sometimes I thought growing up in a small town was boring because there wasn't much to do. Now I realize that because there wasn't a lot going on, it gave me more time to work on building my rap skills. More importantly, I wouldn't have made the friends I have today. Those friends became a big part of my music. When I'm looking for a beat, the first two people I turn to are Diz Dallas and Slakah the Beatchild, both guys whom I grew up with.

The second challenge was dealing with the response from my friends and classmates. I remember hearing what they said after telling my friends that I planned on being a rapper:

“Sure!”

Duane "D.O." Gibson

"Haha ya right...keep dreaming!"

"Man you can't be a rapper...you're from Canada!"

I remember hearing things like this all the time. The worst part about it was these were my friends! Aren't friends supposed to encourage you? Even though my friends were joking, it was still difficult to just shrug it off.

It wasn't just my friends who laughed at my dreams. It was tough when it came from a bully. It was especially challenging when I was in front of a group because everyone would join in and turn my dream into a joke for their amusement.

I used to let these comments discourage me. I thought to myself, *One day I'll prove them wrong.*

Over the years I've learned that it isn't worth your time worrying what other people think.

One time I was at a friend's house shortly after I had released my first music video. I was really proud that I had made a video that made it on MuchMusic. My friend's mother didn't realize this though. She asked me if I was still going through "that rap phase."

To her, my dreams were something I would grow out of. I don't blame her, she didn't realize the commitment I had or the progress that I was making.

It's always interesting when I see someone from back in the day who used to make fun of my rap dreams. Recently this happened when I did a concert in one of my hometowns. We were in Sarnia opening for the Black Eyed Peas. It was a huge concert and there were thousands of people there. We were excited to be sharing the stage with one of the biggest groups in music.

After the performance, I saw a familiar face in front of me. I recognized him as someone I had gone to high school with. At the time, he had made fun of my dreams every chance he got. He said to me, "Duane I *always* knew you were going to make it big!"

Funny how things change. I'm glad I realized that I had to surround myself with people who would support and encourage my dreams. I also couldn't let what people said affect me.

The third challenge was the biggest one of them all...

*I didn't believe that I could do it.*

It was a dream, but it didn't seem possible. Partly because of being from a small town, and partly because of what other people said, I didn't have the belief in myself. I didn't realize it at the time, but having a low self-esteem can be dangerous. You don't dream big because sometimes you think, *What's the point?* You don't

Duane "D.O." Gibson

work hard because you don't think that the hard work will pay off.

I had to change my way of thinking.

In this book I'll talk about the different things I did, and *you* can do, in order to get over these challenges and *Defy the Odds*. I had to visualize and dream. I had to build my skills and practice. I had to surround myself with people who encouraged me and pushed me towards my goal. I had to find role models and heroes who I could look up to and aspire to be. I had to sacrifice, and most importantly, I had to persevere and keep going when I came across challenges. In short, I had to Stay Driven!