

## Eric Schrody, Ex-Catholic, USA (part 1 of 2)

**Description:** An interview with the x rap star EverLast and his journey to Islam. Part 1.

By Adisa Banjoko (interviewer)

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Category: [Articles](#) > [Stories of New Muslims](#) > [Men](#)

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Rap music has seen more than its share of influence from the religion of Islam. With groups such as Public Enemy rapping about their respect for the Nation of Islam, to people such as Q-Tip of a Tribe Called Quest embracing mainstream Islam, the religion seems to be a recurrent theme in the genre, both impacting lyrics and lives. One artist more recently touched by Islam is Eric Schrody, better known in music circles as Everlast.

While Everlast began his musical career as a rap artist, he has recently shown himself to have much greater depth and diversity. His current album, *Whitey Ford Sings the Blues* (currently ranked #49 on billboard's charts after peaking at #9) exhibits this in its reflective and somewhat philosophical tone, showing glimpses of the influence Islam has had on his life.

What follows is an interview in which Everlast discusses his journey to Islam and the challenges he faces as a new Muslim.

AB: Tell me about the first time you learned about Islam?

E: It was probably around the late 80's. I was hangin' out with Divine Styler (a popular Los Angeles rap artist). He was basically at the end of his 5% period (referring to the pseudo-Islamic "Nation of Gods and Earths" sect). He was starting to come into Islam. He lived with the Bashir family. Abdullah Bashir was sort of his teacher; and mine it wound up later. As he was making the transition from 5% into Islam, I would just be around and hear things.

I'm trying to think of the first time I recognized it as Islam. I think it was when one of Divine's friends took Shahadah (the Muslim profession of faith) and I was there. I heard him say, "I bear witness that there is no God but God, and Muhammad is the servant and messenger." And I remember me being like, "What is this? I'm white. Can I be here?" It was outta ignorance, you know? 'Cause here in America, Islam is considered a "Black thing." And that's when someone pointed out to me, "You have no idea how many white Muslims there are in the world." I was like, "Really," and somebody broke it down. I said, "That's crazy. I had no clue."

AB: Do you feel any extra pressure being a white Muslim in America?

E: I don't think of it on the grand scale. To me, Islam is mine. Allah is the God of all the worlds, and all mankind and all the Aalameen (worlds/universe). Islam is my personal relationship with God. So nobody can put any more pressure on me than I can put on myself. But as far as the mosque where I pray, I have never felt more at home or more

welcome. And it's not just mine. The few mosques that I've gone to around the country, I've never ever been made to feel uncomfortable. Like in New York, the mosque is big and there's so many people that nobody is lookin' to notice you. There were Chinese, Korean, Spanish - everything, which was a good thing for me because at my mosque I'm the only white male, [although] there are some white females.

I think at first, I thought about it more than anybody else the first couple times I went to Jumma (the Friday congregational prayer). The first time I went to Jumma, I was taken by a friend of mine in New York. It was in Brooklyn in Bed-Stuy (Bedford Stuyvestant). I was nervous about the neighborhood I was in, not the mosque. But I was just so at ease once I was there. I was like, "This is great." I didn't feel any different than anybody else in the mosque.

AB: How did your family take your turning to Islam? Because you were raised Catholic, right?

E: Well, you know my mom is very open minded, very progressive. My mother lives with me. And I've been raised all my life with not a belief in God, but a knowledge that he exists. I was taught [that] if [I were to know] anything in the world, [I should] know there's a God. And my mom, even though she was Catholic, she was the first person to point out hypocrisy in the church. My mom really hasn't attended church in a long time. But as far as me, my mom is just happy that I have God in my life.

She sees me making prayers. And Divine is one of her favorite people in the world. She knows how much different we are than when she first knew us as kids. When me and Divine first hooked up, we were wild. We were out partyin', fightin', doin' whatever we had to do. We thought, "Yeah, that's what being a man is about. We're gonna go out here and be thuggish."

[But] she has seen how much it's changed me and him; and how much peace it's brought me since I've started to really accomplish something with it. I actually had a long talk with my mother the other day and we were on the topic of religion. We were actually talking about life and death, and the future and when she might go (die, pass away). That won't be for a long time, inshallah (God willing). But I asked her to do me one favor. I said, "Mom, when you die there might be some angels who ask you a question, and I want you to answer it; and I'm not sure exactly how it goes, 'cause I ain't died yet. Remember that there's only one God, and he's never been a man."

She said, "I know what you are trying to tell me." [And] I said, "Jesus wasn't God, Ma."

Some of what I know has definitely shown up in my mother. She's no Muslim, but she knows there's only one God. And that makes me very happy. I know guys that have turned towards Islam and their families have turned them out (i.e. rejected them).

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