

# Ray J breaking from big sister's shadow

NEW YORK (AP) - In the '90s, Ray J's only claim to fame was being Brandy's little brother.

While her star grew on albums and television, Ray Norwood was home in Southern California, trying to be different, standing on a corner with a street gang.

But today, he's enjoying strong sales of his second album, "Raydiation," led by the hit single "One Wish," which is sitting at No. 2 on the R&B chart.

With a show on BET and a gig on UPN's "One on One," the 25-year-old entertainer has managed to transcend his past as a sidekick on his big sister's TV shows and videos. He spoke to The Associated Press about being taken seriously, cleansing demons and why he loves older women.

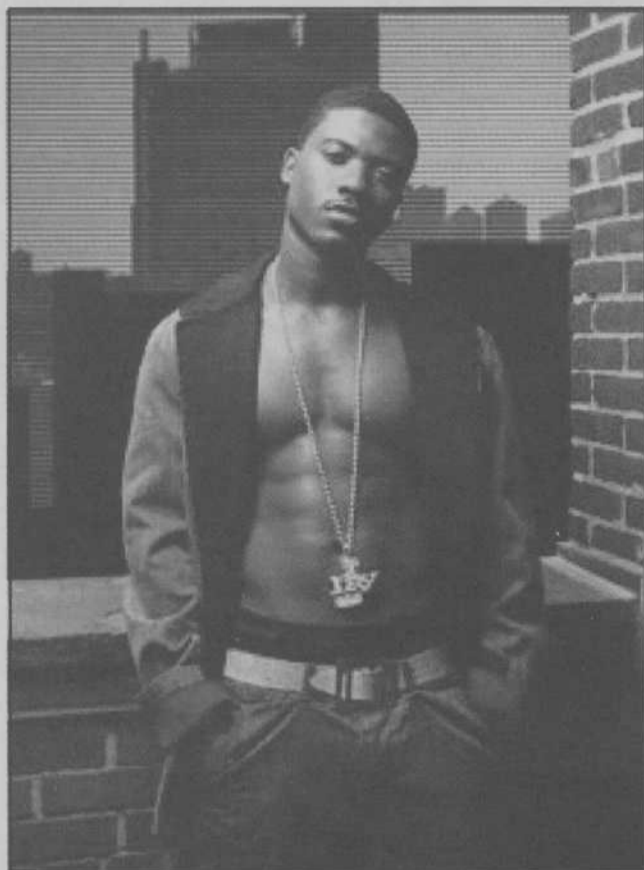
AP: Do you feel misunderstood?

Ray J: I feel like people just don't know what's up. It just takes emotion and time and being consistent with your music and your fans and just staying out on the scene. That's when people start to understand and start to get into your story.

AP: So you're a former gangbanger?

Ray J: Yeah. As a teenager ...I was young and just trying to find myself.

AP: I've read that you've been shot at so many times,



Like sister Brandy, Ray J wants to be a star on his merits.

you can't remember all of them. Did they ever shoot at you for being Brandy's brother?

Ray J: (Laughs) No. When you live in Carson and Compton and Long Beach and you growin' up in the neighborhood, getting shot at is just a regular thing. If you're hanging out at the school after hours with your friends and y'all shootin' dice and people are drinking and smoking and it's a gang environment and it's a party life

constantly, that's where another rival gang targets. Just wearing red or wearing blue, in L.A., you get shot at. It was just one day when I almost got shot in front of my house, my grandma, in front of my family, and I realized it was no more fun and games. We used to run and laugh and hop the gate and get away, but that time I felt like my life was being threatened.

AP: Have you ever shot at anybody?

(See Ray J, Page 9)

## Jackson spotted in robe, veil

MANAMA, Bahrain (AP) - Pop star Michael Jackson was spotted shopping in a Bahrain mall on Wednesday, hiding his face behind a veil and donning a black robe traditionally worn by women in the Gulf.

He was with three children, apparently his own, who also had their faces covered by dark scarves. An unidentified woman accompanied them.

The pop star, who seems to be settling in the Persian Gulf, was seen leaving Marina Mall in the Bahrain capital, holding a child by the hand. On the way out a back door, he shook hands with security guards.

The woman — also dressed in the black robe called an abaya, jeans and a scarf that partially covered her face — had the two other children. All three children were wrapped in black scarves and wore yellow shirts and sweatpants or khakis without robes.

Since his June acquittal on child molestation charges in California, Jackson has made several trips to Bahrain as a guest of Sheik Abdullah bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the son of Bahrain's king.

He reportedly was negotiating a position as a consultant with a Bahrain-based company that plans to set up theme parks and music academies in the Middle East.

On the mall outing, Jackson wore an abaya, pants, a white shirt and men's shoes. His head and face were wrapped in a black veil and he also wore black gloves.

The veil, abaya and gloves were of a style typically worn by conservative Bahraini women. The woman asked photographers to respect their privacy and told them they were scaring the children before they left in a white car with darkened windows.

AAJ Holdings Ltd., owned by Ahmed Abu Bakr Janahi, said it wants to hire the 47-year-old Jackson to give advice on setting up entertainment businesses. He reportedly is building a home in Bahrain, an island nation in the Persian Gulf linked to Saudi Arabia by a bridge.

In November, Jackson stirred controversy in the United Arab Emirates by entering the ladies room in a shopping mall. His publicist said Jackson, who arrived in Dubai as the guest of a champion rally driver, did not understand the Arabic sign on the door and left the bathroom when he realized his mistake.

But local newspapers reported that the performer was applying makeup in the woman's toilets in a Dubai mall. Jackson's host, Mohammed bin Sulayem, dismissed the story as rumor.

# Al Roker celebrates 10 years on 'Today'

NEW YORK (AP) - He's only two-thirds the man he used to be, but Al Roker won't be eating heartily to celebrate 10 years on NBC's "Today" show. He's dieting.

"Today" was to mark the formerly rotund weatherman's anniversary on the air Friday.

"I was just thrilled to get the gig to begin with," Roker told The Associated Press. "Ten years later to still have it is not only thrilling but also somewhat of a puzzlement."

Due to his gastric bypass operation in 2002, Roker spent the past few years as the incredibly shrinking man. With the Winter Olympics again near, his thoughts drift to the Salt Lake City games in 2002, just weeks before he went into surgery.

"I ate myself stupid," he said. "I thought, 'I'm never going to eat like this again.' The only trick was to make sure I didn't have



AL ROKER

a heart attack before I did the deal."

He was 330 pounds at his peak, and bottomed out at 200. He has gone back up to 225 pounds, which is why he's trying to take some more off now.

"Today" is on a high right now, having beaten back a challenge from ABC's "Good Morning America." During the week of Jan. 16, the "Today" lead was up to 1.1 million viewers, according to Nielsen Media Research.

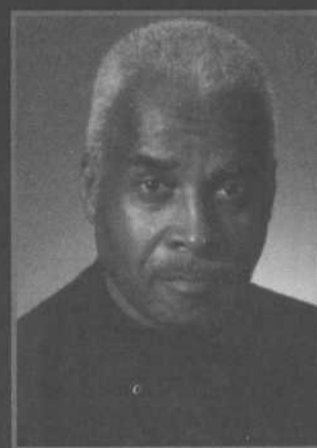
"When the country faces

a crisis, like they did this summer with Hurricane Katrina, they make a decision — do I watch a show because it's the headquarters for a Sunday-night soap opera, or do I watch the program because I know when there's a crisis, these are the people I trust and go to?" he said.

The reference was to ABC's "Desperate Housewives," which was frequently featured on "GMA" when that broadcast was surging last spring.

The core "Today" family of Katie Couric, Matt Lauer, Ann Curry and Roker have been together since 1997, although perhaps not for long. Couric is considering jumping to CBS to anchor its evening news when her contract is up this spring.

"None of us can worry about that, because it's not something we can control," Roker said.



## An Afternoon with J. Everett Prewitt

Prize-winning author, J. Everett Prewitt, will discuss his acclaimed novel *Snake Walkers*, in a program moderated by Everett Louis Overstreet, Ph.D., P.E.

**A book sale and signing will follow**

**Saturday, February 4  
1 p.m.**

West Las Vegas Library  
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