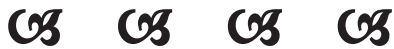


Déjà View
Memoirs of a Funk Diva



Déjà View

Memoirs of a Funk Diva



Patryce "Choc'Let" Banks
formerly of...

Graham Central Station



A Reignbo Publication



Reignbo Publications
P.O. Box 56667
Los Angeles, CA 90056

www.patrycechocletbanks.com
myspace.com/choclet

Deja View: Memoirs of a Funk Diva Copyright © 2009 Patryce Choc'Let Banks

Deja View is based on a true story and is the portrayal of the author's best recollection of events. The dialog in the story was the essence of the conversation but not its exact wording.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Edited by Davida S. James and Patryce Banks
Proofreading by Destiny Horne
Cover Design by Terry a O'Neal
Cover Photo by Guy Viau

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009906528

ISBN: 978-0-9801282-0-8

Printed in the U.S.A.

First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedication

To NoNa's babies: Jai and Reign Patryce, to whom I pass down a legacy of wisdom, courage, "stick-to-it-ness" and love...

Acknowledgements

It's You and me, Lord. I know You have me in the palm of Your hand and didn't bring me this far to leave me.

Whew! I thought I'd never finish this book. Each "final" edit revealed I'd forgotten a crucial fact or tidbit. I couldn't write the words fast enough, as memories flooded my mind, desperate to escape ambiguity. Research was another potential never-ending task. Each fact, a cumulation of irresistible tan-gents taking me in several directions at once.

I experienced all the frustration and joy, of a first time self-published/author, but the sense of accomplishment made it all worthwhile. I can't wait to do it again!

When doubt tried to step in and convince me that I was sharing too much about my life, I had to rebuke it. This is my reality and the revelation of my truth. Finally satisfied that I have said all that must be said—I release *Deja View* into the Universe.

What would I do without my family? How would I know what unconditional love feels like? Where would I go for security and support? I would be lost without:

...Bernice Roberson, my Mama, personal Angel, best friend, mentor, and cheerleader—you are love.

...Donald, my husband of twenty-three years, is inspiration for women who have given up on the concept of a "good man."

...My daughters, Unique and Destiny, never cease to amaze me as they blossom with beauty, grace, creativity, determination, and strength—Queens in training!

...My grandbabies, for whom I live and toil to save the planet and their future.

My people! ~ The Williams Family, Dianne Springs, Suhayla Sabir, Shari “Magil” Morgan. My brothers; Otys Jr., Robert, Lewis, Michael, Reg, Mitchell, and Henry Banks, Priscilla Matlock and Cynthia Bass.

Terry O’Neal, I love you cousin. You continue to inspire and support my “...literary dreams, no matter how unlikely they may seem!”

Last but not least, my daddy, Rev. Otys D. Banks Sr... continue to deploy those Angels (*because I know you are up there telling everybody what to do!*), so that I may travel on their wings....

Love,

Pat

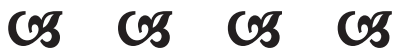
*“The person who says it cannot be done should not
interrupt the person who is doing it.”*

— Chinese Proverb

Déjà vu—the illusion that one has previously
had a given experience.
Webster's New World Dictionary

*Déjà View—A guided tour. You will taste, smell,
hear, and feel the reality of my experience.
No illusions. Come with me.
Choc'let*

Déjà View
Memoirs of a Funk Diva



Chapter One

I couldn't believe I was finally on my way to Oakland! On the short forty-five minute PSA flight with my head laid back and my eyes closed, I went over the events in the past four months that brought me to this moment. I met Larry Graham—my prince, my knight in funky armor, romantic fantasy, and idol—all rolled up into one. He said he loved only me, and now I was on my way to Oakland so we could live happily ever after.

Sly and the Family Stone's number one fan, I was standing on the verge of the most exciting time of my life!

The first time I heard Sly and the Family Stone on the radio it was cosmic. The unusual sound of the group, which the DJ labeled "Funk" touched me inside in a place that I didn't know existed. It felt like a religious experience.

FUNK: Stanky, make you move your head, frown up your face, stomp your feet, and hollah—Hey! I was baptized, never to listen to music the same way again. From then on, it was all about the groove. It became my personal mission to tell everybody I knew about the band. I rushed out and bought all of their albums, sat down, and started studying—FUNK 101.

Each member of the group had their own unique style. My favorites were Larry, Sly, Rose, and Freddy. Sly was the chosen one, a creative genius, and the vessel through which God funk'd up the universe. The ringleader, he made music that could reach any heart, soul, creed, color, or location.

Rose, his sister, was doing something I'd never heard before. I was familiar with white bands with female lead singers. Jefferson Airplane was the most popular one. Psychedelia, however, was not my thing. Now, here was a sister who was singing, and playing on the front line.

Jerry Martini and Cynthia Robinson, a white man and black woman, were blowing the hell outta' those horns. Cynthia was amazing. Who knew a woman could play a horn?

Greg Errico was on the drums. Where did Sly find a white boy who could hold down a groove? Not just any groove, but the funk!

Sly's brother, Freddie, played the guitar and sang like an angel. He always fooled you. When you expected the melody to go one way, he turned it upside down and made it his own.

Last, but not least, was Larry Graham—Sexy Thunder. I never knew bass existed until hearing Larry play. Although I'd been in one band or another all through school, he made the bass talk. His voice rivaled the deep, relentless groove of his bass, making me fall in love at first sound.

My first close encounter with the Family was in Las Vegas, working with a group called the Doodletown Pipers. The Pipers portrayed the image of an all American, apple pie-eating bunch of kids. There were sixteen of us, with only five blacks. Joining the group right out of high school, it was my first professional gig. We traveled all over the U.S. and Canada, as I smiled, sang, and danced my way through some of the corniest material I'd ever heard.

We played Vegas all the time. I'd seen all the lounge acts there were, over and over again. The Pipers played the Frontier Hotel at least four months out of the year. When we were with Phil Harris, we played the larger Venus Room. Elvis Presley made his debut Vegas performance there. Bill Cosby, Barbara McNair, Eddie Fisher,

Wayne Newton, The Osmond Brothers, Flip Wilson and Diana Ross and the Supremes were among the long list of legends who worked the stage.

We worked the smaller Post Time Theatre when we weren't on the bill with Phil.

After our last set at the Frontier Hotel, it was always late. We would be wired up, not quite ready to call it a night. We looked for some place, any place, to party until we were ready to drop.

One sweltering summer Vegas day, it was my turn to grocery shop. Finally finished, I was speeding back trying to get out of the heat. The swimming pool at the Bali Hai Motor Inn (*located right behind the Desert Sands Hotel*) was calling my name. Driving down the Strip, something caught my eye on the Flamingo Hotel marquee: "*Appearing Now! Sly and the Family Stone.*" I couldn't believe it, speeding even faster to take a closer look. Nope, it wasn't a hallucination. Sly was opening that very same night!

It was our night off. I begged Sherry, my roommate, to come with me to check them out. She was into Carol King and Laura Nero at the time. Promising I'd cook for a week, she agreed to go with me. When we got there, it was all so exciting that I was getting on my *own* nerves. Oddly, there was hardly anyone in the audience. How lucky could I get? We sat down right in front. From the moment they hit the stage, I studied each one of them imprinting a firm image in my mind. Later, back at the Bali, I could relive every moment.

Larry was tall, slim, dark, and very handsome. His long hair, fried and swooped to the side, big eyes (*one of them kinda wandered just a little*), and the brightest smile with the most perfect set of teeth I'd ever seen.

Rose was little, about five feet. She had pretty features, but looked intense. Huge, soulful notes came from a mouth that hardly opened

when she sang. Her style was radical. The white wigs and her clothes, as well as the rest of the groups', was the grooviest gear I'd ever seen.

Freddy was tallish, with a nice body and a pleasant, down-to-earth vibe. He sang *Try A Little Tenderness* by Otis Redding, and made tears come to my eyes.

Cynthia, the trumpet player, was tall with flawless, peach colored skin. Her face was pretty, but she had masculine mannerisms. From a distance she looked like a cute guy. Totally into the music, she seemed to follow wherever it led, all the while getting her groove on.

Jerry played the saxophone. He looked like a rich hippie. Shorter than Cynthia, he wore a Big Apple cap that hid his eyes, with a long, curly ponytail hanging down his back. He seemed to be good natured and just glad to be able to make a living doing what he obviously seemed to love.

Greg, the drummer, was cute. Definitely holding the groove down, he beat the hell out of those drums, as his hair flew every which way.

Sly was positioned in the center of the stage behind a keyboard. His air of confidence could easily be mistaken for arrogance. Beneath a rhinestone-studded hat, a slim face was hidden, revealing only huge white teeth. It was clear he was in full control. All I had to do was fasten my seat belt and he would do the rest. Sly then took his place as the captain, and his crew took you as high as you could go without drugs.

Something became crystal clear to me, like a revelation, while Sly was playing. The word "funk" just didn't seem adequate for the feeling the music gave me. When Sly was making us dance to the music, he said, "The **funk** will do you no harm!" Now that was more

like it! And so it was. The live music was full of energy, piercing my soul like a laser. Hypnotically mesmerizing grooves convinced me I was in heaven at the Flamingo Lounge.

Two years later, as fate would have it, my high school band, The New Perspectives, was the opening act on a show at the Forum in Los Angeles. I met the promoter of the concert, Dick Griffey, while still in The Pipers. He saw potential, offering to manage me if I was ever interested in a solo career. He gave me his number and said to give him a call.

Soon after leaving The Pipers, deciding to go solo, I called Dick. True to his word, this was the first gig he booked for my band. The headliners were The Young Rascals and Sly and the Family Stone were the special guests.

I was on the verge of sharing the same stage with my idols. In two years they had become huge. Their music was all over the radio, and Larry had set a precedent for bass players all over the world. The New Perspectives' bass player, Alex, could hardly wait to study him up close.

The time had come, and the MC was announcing; The New Perspectives. I couldn't tell you what happened after we went on if you paid me. In a zone, all I remember is the response we got. Local and unknown for the most part, the audience gave us an enthusiastic reception, so I guess we threw down!

I practically ran off stage to the dressing room to change. Sly was next, and I wanted to get a bird's eye view, not missing one single note! The guys were on a natural high. They felt we had a successful show, so they were busy acting like big shots in front of their various women. After congratulating one another, I rushed off to find the perfect spot.