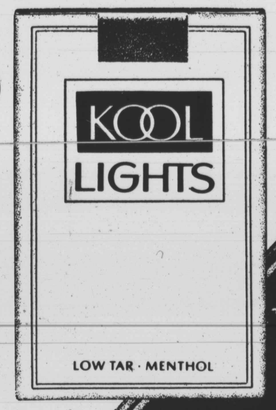
KOOL LIGHTS



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Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

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A casual visit with Kweisi Mfume

"It's difficult to have a private life."

By Racine S. Winborne
AFRO Staff Writer

The boy was raised in Turner Station,a post-war black settlement outside Baltimore. It still stands.

When he was ten, Frizzell "Pee Wee" Tate, his four younger sisters, and his mother moved back to the city to Pennsylvania Avenue near Laurens Street.

His real father, Rufus Tate, wrote numbers, labored as a chef for sixteen years, loved nice clothes and writing short stories.

Mary Elizabeth Tate, Frizzell's mother, schooled him in morality, Christianity, jazz and family responsibility. She also gave him his first lessons in politics, introducing him to the teachings and thoughts of Malcolm X.

"My mother died in my arms in the livingroom of my house. We had often talked about how life would be after her death. My father was a person who lived in the streets. He was a person whom I didn't know very well until I was older."

Frizzell Tate was like any other precocious young man growing up surrounded by the excitement of life along the "Avenue". He loved sports, school, music, dancing, and girls.

It was a curious neighborhood, with places like the Royal Theatre; The New Albert Hall; The Regent Theatre; The Met, and Mom Theresa's Restaurant, all located in close proximity to one another. He often tried sneaking behind the celebrated doors for a peek.

"The Muslim Mosque at 514 Wilson St. was very much alive and running. Minister Louis Farrakan was someone who you would quite often see walking the streets, as well as, Muhammad Ali. It was right before the decline.

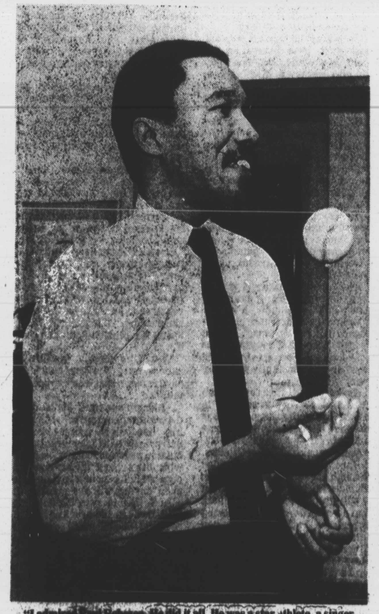
"It was like being told you have to wait until you grow up to go and watch a stage show. I tried on several occasions (to sneak in) but my mother's family was a large family...somebody would always grab me by my ear and say I'm gonna tell your mother on you .' So I stopped trying."

Years later during the 60's, the same young man became caught up in the urgency for black freedom, changing his name to another that better reflected his African cultural heritage.

"I had an Aunt Louise visit Africa. This was her second trip and I told her, Look when you go you gotta bring me back some suggestions.

"She went there and went to several countries and brought back several names...well this is the name that I was most attracted to because of its phonetic pronunciation and because of its meaning. Kweisi means "conquering," and Mfume means "son of kings."

Councilman Kweisi Mfume also selected the Guyanese name as a legacy for his children, his five sons, in hopes that they would not cling to society's myths about black men, but rather that they might know that they have a rich legacy and are the sons of kings.



"I admired Paul Robeson than like it all. He was a star athlete, a singer, an academic. My mother was a fan of Paul Robeson."

(AFRO Photos by P. A. Greene)

"I was very active in sports. I was very active in organizations. I always wanted to like . . . I was always impressed with Congressman Parren Mitchell."

"If and when Parren retires, if he retires and the seat becomes vacant, if I am able to determine that a large enough 7th Congressional District would like me to seek the office to represent them, then I am gonna run."

Having recently concluded a second successful campaign for a councilmanic seat in the fourth district, WEAA's popular program director and radio personality now has time for relaxation.

Seated in the livingroom of his comfortable yet modest home, the sitting room, smartly decorated in shades of green—with lime being the dominant shade—reminds the visitor of a tropical jungle.

The room is engulfed by healthy plants, spiders, rubber plants cornstalk trees, and by records, books and clever electronic gadgetries. Kweisi is both a philospher and an artist; a comedian and a dreamer and a frustrated actor who proclaims, "If I could get a job in the theatre I'd give up politics."

Nightly, over Morgan's FM station, he is the voice behind the prolific discussion oriented program, "Two Way Talk," and serves as co-host of an over the air book review forum entitled "First Tuesday."

When his mother passed away in 1965, the then 16-year-old, was forced to go out and work to support his family. An avid student , he attended Booker T. Washington Junior High and later Douglass High.

"I dropped out of Douglass the week after I buried my mother . I was out for three and a half years. Later I paid for my GED studies...I attended the Temple Institute which at that time was over the Trailway Bus Terminal."

Mfume was also a member of the Falcon Drum and Bugle Corps, an experience that he recalled fondly. "People still say, weren't you in the Falcons?' I say yeah, I was that skinny guy who played the French Horn."

During the years of working two and three odd jobs, shining shoes at Lafayette and Lexington Markets, and on North Avenue at Nate's and Leon's, working as a sales clerk and loading produce trucks , he continued to cultivate a love for jazz.

"There was alot of music around my house. Sarah Vaughn and Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong and Louis Bellson, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Betty Carter, Lionel Hampton...that's the music that I grew up with. Jazz is still my first love."

Two teenage disc jockeys from WWIN, Champ Hagers and Sam Beasley, inspired him along with Hot Rod, Sir Johnny O, Rockin' Robin, and Larry Dean. The teen jocks fascinated him and led him to volunteer at the various stations for four years as a "gopher."

The experience led to an audition which opened up his first paying position as a news reporter. After a few free lance stints, Mfume took his current radio position in 1976.

"I guess I'm just a people oriented person . . . I want to do more work with young kids and I hope to get married one day. It's something that I would hope to do if somebody will marry me because this is no way for anybody to have to live . . . I don't expect to be a bachelor for the rest of my life . . . for now I'll suffer peacefully."

"I've never had a communications course in my life. I picked up a lot of experience volunteering which I recommend to anybody...I don't care what it is...volunteering is something that I advocate wholeheartedly."

Today at 34, Kweisi Mfume is many things. And then again there are many things that he is not. He is not a member of the Nation of Islam, though he considers Minister Farrakan his friend and ally.

Mfume is a father and for the past eight years, he has lived the life of an eligible bachelor. He has also captured the fancy of a large audience of men and women. When he announced this year that he would relinquish his radio talk show position, the overwhelming public outcry changed his mind. He was told that when the public was ready to get rid of him, they would let him know with out any coaxing from him.

He is also the apple of many adoring female eyes. The list of adjectives and phrases that they use to describe him includes such comments as, sexy, handsome, intelligent, he wears his suits nicely, he has a nice voice and, is he married.

Naturally, Mfume gets embarrassed and he even blushes. He counters with his own impressions of how he wants to be perceived by women. "I'd like to be seen as someone who is principled, who has integrity, who is honest, determined and trustworthy."

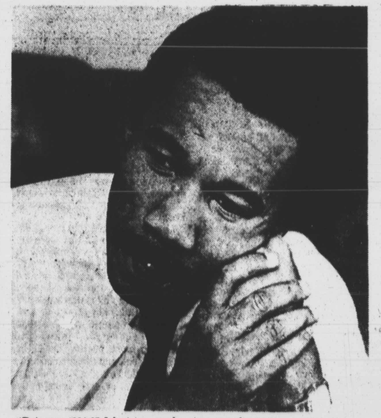
And what about his taste in women? Kweisi says that she must have some of the personality traits his mother had. But not all of them.

"I like women who can carry on a discussion with me about anything, whether its the deplorment of Pershing Cruise Missiles in Western Europe or talking about what's a good fish to bake.

"I like women who believe in themselves, who understand their larger role in life outside of just being a woman, I like a woman with a sense of humor...you gotta have that cause I get tired of hearing myself laugh. I like honesty.

"I like Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan and a woman name Mrs. Violette H. Whyte. You always heard about her because your parents said that if you didn't do right they were gonna send you to Mrs. Whyte.

"I was always in love with Diana Ross...I don't know...I think it was just a strong physical attraction."



"Between 1964-67 I lost two uncles, two grandparents, an aunt, two neighborhood buddies and my mother. I became a lot stronger and I developed a prospective on life that I never let go of . . . that life is too short."

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