TITLE: Genesis the Greykid: Well Versed

Intro:

Genesis the Greykid doesn’t know how old he is.

“I tell everyone I’m 56,” he says. “I’m lying, of course.”

A lot of people say age is just a number. To Genesis, age is less than that: it doesn’t exist. So he moves through life without the pressures of birthdays passing him by. It’s enough, for now, to be defined simply as a young person with an old soul – i.e., the Greykid – who is finally doing what he was always meant to do: “I’m a poet. And by that I mean, poetry pays the bills.”

This statement, he says, always leads to more questions. Painters, sculptors, musicians, novelists – these are professionals who are accepted as such. For some reason, poetry is different.

“When I tell people I’m a poet, they say, ‘That’s great. But what do you do for a living?’” Genesis says. “They look at me like they’ve come across a moon rock. So that’s part of what I do, too. I want to eliminate people being baffled by this.”

For Genesis, who was born Russell McGee Jr, living as a career poet feels completely natural, because poetry is more than something he puts out into the world. It’s how he sees the world, how he takes it in.

“Poetry, I can’t explain all of it – just a piece,” he says. “It’s openness. Taking notice of every small thing. If you can be aware, you can be a poet.”

Genesis grew up in Chattanooga and has spent a good deal of time in New York City, working as a poet and artist for the Manhattan-based media label Creative Control TV. He moved back to Chattanooga several years ago, and in 2015, he released his first collection of poems, titled “Words in Grey.”

But Genesis’s work as a poet goes beyond pen and paper. In Chattanooga, he’s made a name for himself by offering his poetic perspective in the form of a service. He attracts a range of corporate and startup clients who are searching for fresh ways to view or approach something – their work, their audience, their office space, each other.

If you’re tempted to classify Genesis as a creative consultant, he’s not. Consultants often draw conclusions based on their analysis and experience; Genesis’s work is designed to provoke thoughts and feelings in other people, which lead them to their own powerful conclusions. Usually, he does this by exposing them to some sort of new experience, be it bizarre or beautiful or terrifying.

Recently, he led a workshop at the Edney Building, a newly revitalized space in the heart of Chattanooga’s innovation district. The team was stuck on the design – how to make it feel inclusive, while maintaining the identity of the enterprise. So they brought Genesis in, and he started with a question: is a potato worth a life? Then he played very real – intense, disturbing – footage of a Kenyan man who stole a potato in his village and as punishment, was brutally beaten, lit on fire and left to die.

Every person in the room was visibly affected.

“Afterward, I told them to start writing about it, as if they were there,” he says. “And they could be anything there: the man, a tourist. They could be the gasoline splashing around, not knowing what it’s going to be poured on. It forces you to take a position, to tap into something that you would never tap into, to take notice of what you normally have the luxury of not seeing.”

Genesis’s methods are so effective because they produce pure, unfiltered reactions. Of course, workshops are just one manifestation of his profession; his poetry bleeds into other crafts. The music he posts to YouTube has been noticed by very recognizable names in the industry, like Atlantic Records, which offered him a contract that he ultimately chose to walk away from.

“I’m cool with endings,” Genesis says. “That just means I’m about to jump on something else. Ending is a part of beginning.”

When you’re a creative, especially one named Genesis, your work is full of beginnings. And every now and then, if you’re intentional – and maybe a little lucky – it could be the start of a movement.

“Right now, I want more people doing what I’m doing. I’m trying to figure out a way to hire more poets, to pull them directly from a community, to show this can be done,” he says. “I’m a big believer that if you stick to your passion, if you put good stuff out there, the universe knows what you need. And you’ll get it.”