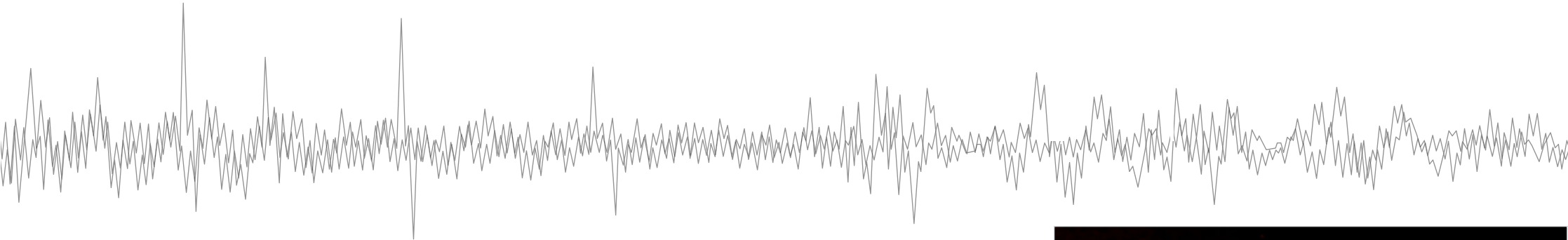




**SHARING HIS NEWEST SONG:** Thompson hangs with family members in his car in Lauderhill while playing a new song he recorded. Thompson says feedback and support from family, friends, and hip-hop fans inspire him. "That's what keeps me going in hip-hop," says Thompson. "That just makes me feel like somebody's listening, and it's not all for nothing."



# SHORTY REAL RUTH BRINKLEY

There will be no compromise for Ruth Brinkley, professionally or personally. Inspired by artists such as Tupac Shakur, KRS-One and Public Enemy, Brinkley, of Hollywood, wanted to make music to touch people's lives, to make a difference.

"The power of the mic is to make people listen," said Brinkley, 24, also known as Shorty Real. "I want to be as real as possible. Even my hair. That's why I wear dreds. I figure, if you're going to talk, you might as well say something."

Her pro-black and feminist lyrics, she said, give her authenticity. Her realness.

Brinkley was born in New Jersey to an Afro-Cuban mother and African-American father. Her parents separated when she was about 4, and her father married a woman of Dominican and Puerto Rican heritage. But Brinkley does not consider herself multicultural. She's black.

Brinkley learned about drugs, gangs and teen pregnancy first-hand, watching friends and family succumb to each. She was on her own by 15, kicked out because her rebellious way didn't mesh with her father's strict rules.

She lived in a group home, at shelters and with friends. At 16, she joined Job Corps, a federal trade program for 16- to 24-year-olds. It was like living on the streets, she said.

Brinkley turned to music to see her through. She grabbed the microphone every chance she got, at talent shows or rapping freestyle on the block.

It wasn't until one of her brothers fatally overdosed two years ago that she and her father reconciled. A year later, she lost a second brother to a brain aneurysm. Her mother found him in bed.

After her brothers died, she rededicated herself to the music. It's sharpened her focus and hardened her resolve.

"The music thing now, it makes you, like ... life is precious. Here today. Gone the next," she said. "There is more to life than drugs because the music right now, that's all people talk about. They want to be drug dealers, but it affects people's lives. Nobody wants to talk about it, but it kills."



**TRYING TO BE POSITIVE:** Ruth Brinkley, also known as Shorty Real, pauses while recording in a makeshift studio in Sunrise. "A lot of people want to hear the booty-shake and sex-sells type [song]," says Brinkley. "I'm against that, and I'm really tired of it actually. It is hard being a female trying to go for the positive side because a lot of people don't want to hear that."



**SUPPORT FOR FAMILY:** Brinkley, right, has her hair pulled by nephew C.J. Velasquez as, in the background from left, niece Alyssa Colon, niece Giselle Colon, and sister Marlene Velasquez, look on in Tampa. "Recently losing my two brothers has brought my family a lot closer," Brinkley says.

