

Growing up in East New York, Brooklyn, Russell Jones, who became famous as the rapper Ol' Dirty Bastard, spent his summers working whatever odd jobs he could line up. But it was in one particular job, selling newspapers at the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, that he displayed some of the traits that would propel him in his career.

While his fellow salesmen, an older brother and two cousins, sold complete papers, Mr. Jones increased his profits by separating the news pages from the comics and selling them separately, according to his brother Mark, who sometimes ended up fielding the complaints.

The boys were paid a set amount for each paper they sold, but "if you could sell half a newspaper, they can't count that," said Mark Jones, recalling his brother's reasoning. "He wanted to make money."

That ambition, fused as it was with a penchant for antics and a talent for humor, would lead Mr. Jones, a founding member of the Wu-Tang Clan, to fast stardom with the group's 1993 debut album, "Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)." His wobbly howl, hallucinatory rapping and clownish behavior made him stand out among the other members of the innovative group, often credited with reinvigorating East Coast hip-hop.

But his very success in an industry notorious for its easy access to sex and drugs, coupled with an inability to say no, contributed to his death on Saturday at the age of 35, relatives said at a gathering earlier this week.

"Now you're a renowned entertainer, but he stayed in Brooklyn - he didn't go buy the big house up on the hill," said his sister Dionne. "He wanted to be normal. He wanted to be Rusty," she said.

But as a success, added his sister Monique, people saw him differently. "He couldn't come to the neighborhood anymore and be who he was," she said, "because now he'd become O.D.B."

What actually killed Mr. Jones will not be known for another week or so, according to the city medical examiner's office, but an uncle, James Gaskins, said yesterday that he suspected that his nephew had had a bad reaction to medication he was taking for depression.

He struggled with bouts of drug addiction and erratic outbursts over the years, culminating in a two-to-four-year sentence for drug possession. Paroled last year, Mr. Jones had signed on with a new record label and had nearly completed a comeback album when he collapsed and died in a Midtown Manhattan recording studio.

Relatives and associates said that things seemed to be looking up for him at the time of his death, that he had managed to stay out of trouble since his release from prison. But the life of Mr. Jones, known variously as Rusty, Unique, Dirt McGirt and Big Baby Jesus, a man with intense and sprawling family ties, is a tale of an irrepressible performer brought low by an inability to resist drugs and manage his responsibilities.

At a parole hearing in February 2003, he told the Parole Board that he had not taken any drugs in four years, the longest he had ever been clean, and described his world as one of "a lot of temptation."

"When you got the stardom," he told them, "you got the ladies all around, you got all kinds of foolish things messing with your head."

One of six children born to Cherry and William R. Jones, a city employee and a transit worker, respectively, Russell Tyrone Jones spent much of his youth in the Linden projects in East New York. Although the family was musically inclined, staging group performances of R & B hits for one another, Mr. Jones was the last child his relatives would have pegged for musical success. An older brother was the artist in the family; Russell was a clown from the start.

Playful but headstrong and rebellious, Mr. Jones clashed with his father over his decisions to join the Five Percent sect of the Nation of Islam and to drop out of high school. But he was ultimately able to create a cottage industry out of his own sensibility, helping to form Wu-Tang with his cousins Robert Diggs, known as RZA, and Gary Grice, known as GZA or the Genius. (

[Source](#)

)