Over the past four decades, dozens of albums, movies, and books have chronicled Compton. For as much as Jehkai proudly continues this tradition, the 19-year-old rapper, singer, and artist does so from an entirely fresh perspective. Soundtracked by heavenly piano, skyscraping guitar leads, and trap 808s, his music feels like a tour of one of South Central’s most notorious neighborhoods. He welcomes listeners into the passenger seat as he cruises on an unbelievable journey brought to life by his traffic-stopping vocals, smooth flows, and cinematic storytelling. After inking a deal with Atlantic Records in 2021, he details his trauma, trials, tribulations, and triumphs on his debut mixtape, *Pain Preacher*, and more music to come.

“I’m really trying to give you a look inside of what this generation’s youth go through in Compton,” he explains. “Compton is home, but it’s automatically what I don’t want to see in my head. I love my hometown, and I’m going to give back to it. It’s a tough community though, so I’m preaching pain and what goes on in Compton.”

Jehkai was born the sixth of eight kids and immediately understood hardship. *“A true O.G.*,*”* his father did eight years in jail for taking the fall for a friend. Living in the projects, mushrooms grew out of the concrete in the family’s apartment complex, even making his little sister sick. *“We fought the city for ten years over that and lost*,*”* he sighs. *“You’re not going to beat the whole city when you’re from poverty*.*”* With dad finally home, they bounced around Southern California, sharing a room in his grandmother’s house for a while. By the time he started high school, they reached rock bottom and needed to sleep in their van for three months.

“We’d park in the hospital and sleep on an air mattress in the third row,” he recalls. “Nobody questions you, if you sleep at the hospital. I’d literally get dressed in the car and take my mom to work.”

Nevertheless, he immersed himself in music, listening to everyone from Michael Jackson and his *“idol”* Tupac to Drake. Around the same time, Jehkai’s parents split up, and he stopped going to school, so his mother kicked him out. Upon finding out she had cancer two months later, he moved back in. Mom managed to beat it, but his auntie unfortunately did not.

“When we lived in the projects, my auntie took care of me,” he says. “She really raised me. After she died and my mom got sick, I started to take music seriously.”

He dropped his first independent single “The Field” in 2020. However, he honed his signature style on the follow-up “Glory To God,” blending new age street rap, impressive pitch, and vocal acrobatics. At the time, he had moved into a hotel with his brother and manager in the midst of the Global Pandemic. The song sparked a bidding war between labels as he took countless meetings over ZOOM from quarantine in the hotel. He ultimately chose Atlantic, because it’s where he felt most *“comfortable”* and *“at home*.*”* Signing to the label, he dove into crafting what would become *Pain Preacher*. After hearing “Glory To God,” Lil Durk wanted to hop on the Remix, so he recorded a verse. He also cut a verse on *Pain Preacher*’s track “Street Life” [feat. Lil Durk]. In between airy piano and a skittering beat, his voice flutters from breathless bars into moments of high-register catharsis as he extends an invitation, *“Welcome to the street life*.*”*

“I’m speaking a lot of facts on that song,” he reveals. “Most of it is what I’ve seen or been through. I’m just being real and opening up. A lot of people don’t do that.”

On “My Eyes” [feat. Bankroll Freddie], he slides through soulful throwback production with breezy bars before another hypnotic hook. Meanwhile, “2LIVEINDIEINLA” pairs a soaring guitar lead with his melodic delivery. Everything culminates on the confessional “Bedtime Prayer” where he opens up at his most raw.

“When I was sleeping in the car, I used to pray before I went to bed every night,” he admits. “I didn’t know if somebody was going to run up on me and kill me. I didn’t know what was going to happen. It’s really how it went.”

In the end, Jehkai is just starting to tell his story.

“When you listen to me, I hope you relate and want to hear the next chapter,” he leaves off. “I want you to think. I want you to cry. I want you to feel my pain and maybe, because of it, feel better.”