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## Speakeasy with ... IronE Singleton

The quiet cast member of AMC's 'The Walking Dead' shares insight on 'T-Dog' and himself

by Edward Adams [@edlovesbacon](#)

IronE Singleton's bio reads like it was scripted for a movie. Born and raised in the Perry Homes housing projects in Southwest Atlanta, his mother was a drug addict, his father was absent from his life. He used football and acting as a vehicle to get beyond his environs and seek a better future for himself. Playing football at the University of Georgia to pursue a degree in theater, Singleton later channeled his early street experiences and influences into an autobiographical one-man stage play, titled *The Resurrection*, where he plays 18 characters that influenced his upbringing. It's the amalgamation of those personal archetypes he manifests on screen as Alton, the projects kingpin in *The Blindside* or recently with his role as T-Dog on AMC's "The Walking Dead." While in town to promote the national Run for Your Life fun run tour that kicked off in Georgia earlier this month, we sat with him over breakfast at the Four Seasons to discuss growing up in Atlanta, insights on his alter ego T-Dog, and what to expect in upcoming episodes of the show.



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EDWARD ADAMS

STRONG SILENT TYPE: IronE Singleton shows he has what it takes to make it in Hollywood.

*Note, the interview took place prior to the airing of episode 11, Judge, Jury Executioner, in which Dale (Jeffrey DeMunn) dies. "The Walking Dead" airs Sundays at 9 p.m. on AMC.*

### CL: Is there more to T-dog than meets the eye?

**Singleton:** Yeah, I would compare T-Dog to me. That's when I'm doing my character work, they all start from a baser foundation of who I am. I try to find as many similarities between me and the character I'm playing and I see T-Dog as having a solid spiritual foundation. It hasn't come out yet but if he continues to live, *if* he survives then ...

### We have a few episodes before the season ends. Can you give us some idea about what's going to happen? I'll make it easy, are you still on the farm?

Yes, we're on the farm and the farm is going to become a totally different place. Try to think back to season one when all Hades broke loose. We're going to have something similar. The CDC was nothing compared to this, and what's about to go down ... I can't go into any further than that but it's going to get more exciting and morality is about to come into question in a major way. Get ready for disappointment and heartbreak.

### Hmmm ... that sounds like someone we really like is going to die.

I didn't say that ...

### Going back to T-Dog, you said you pull him out of yourself, when you read the original script and discussed your character, did he change at all?

We talked mainly with Glen Mazzara. We had a sit-down for about an hour about my character and how I saw him and it's the same way as I see my mission as IronE on this Earth and that's to serve as a beacon of light and inspiration to others. Someone mentioned on my Twitter account that they saw T-Dog as a mentor before this whole thing [zombie apocalypse] broke out. And I said, "Yeah I can see how T-Dog can be that way." I can see him being a veteran from the military, that's possible, too. He's a good guy, he's always been about justice and fighting for the everywoman/everyman and just wanting justice to prevail ... at all cost. So even at sacrificing his life, even if he has to do that in order to save another, someone whose good-natured and good-spirited, he'd do it.

### I noticed in the first season, T-Dog seemed a little angry about the situation he was in and more integral to the conversations being held, but this season he mellowed out and more of a follower.

T-Dog is like, "Man, I'm not gonna get caught up in this nonsense, I just want to survive." I mean look at Rick and Shane, its like y'all are staring at each other and then Darryl and every time I turn around somebody is arguing, there's this drama going on and T-Dog is like, "I've already had enough of this in my life. It's where I

came from in the pre-apocalyptic world, so I don't want anything to do with. Just let me know when the zombies are here and if you need my help with that, but this other stuff leave me out of it." [laughs]

**Yeah you tend to have this look on your face that says, "seriously?"**

Oh, you caught that! [laughs] I mean we have bigger fish to fry, bigger things to worry about, right?

**Right.**

And now you got Lori's baby, and [T-Dog] is like, "What's going on? I'm pitching my tent over here!"

**Where you a big fan of horror movies?**

No! When I was around 5 or 6, my mom would take my brother and I to see every *Friday the 13th* and every other horror movie that came out, and she got a kick out of that. We were at the Rialto Theater and we'd just watch these movies and we'd be all scared and she got a kick out of watching us. She'd laugh and she'd see my brother over there whose almost two years older than myself, and he'd hold his hands over his eyes and he'd try his best to fall asleep, but I'd just be into it and it kind of traumatized me. So I had to cope with that and deal with it as best I could and having PTSD from growing up in the inner city, that just added to it. When my agent brought it ["The Walking Dead"] to me, I was like, "Umm, I'm not into zombies like that, not into Sci-Fi, horror." But when he said that Frank Darabont and others were part of it, I said lets give it a go. I said to myself, "I'm grown now," and can shake off the fear and once I got the script I was like, this is beautiful.

**Has there been anything on the set in the past two years that freaked you out?**

No, not freaked me out but some grotesque things from the zombies, because that's all the time. I will say that Well Walker (season 2, episode 4) ... that's a nasty one. I gagged perpetually. They thought they would have to stop shooting because I keep gagging. Greg Nicotero is a genius special effects artist.

**So just curious, you and Dale are the only ones that they haven't tried to partner up with anyone.**

[laughs] Oh, well I think they're saving the best for last ... in my Barry White voice.

**Have you had any conversations about that – a love interest for your character?**

It's come up. People are actually speculating that T-Dog is the father of Lori's child [laughs]. Wait until that baby is born and you see that black baby come out and people are going to be like, "When did this happen?" and T-Dog is going to be over in the corner picking his teeth saying, "... what?" [laughs]

**People don't know you're a hometown boy. Tell me about your life growing up**

It was rough. You know, its that typical life that you hear about in the news or in the movies. My mom was a crack addict and an alcoholic also. My father wasn't around, only saw him twice in my life. My grandmother was the rock – the matriarch. She was the one who raised me, or else I probably would have ended up in the foster care system, if not killed at an early age. I remember getting hit by a car when I was 4 or 5 and ended up at the hospital. [Actually] my brother and I both got hit. My mother was going somewhere and she said not to open the door. My brother is 5 and I'm 3 maybe, crawled out there and car hit me, luckily it wasn't going too fast. Ended up at the clinic and I think if it wasn't for my grandmother there would have been more incidents like that because she left us home alone a lot.

My mother was always in and out doing her thing. She started doing drugs when I was in the womb. It was one of the things I was teased about growing up; they used to call me a crack baby. But crack wasn't out then it was Heroin. But my grandmother provided a stable home, cooked a good meal, nursed me back to health when I was sick, and she did what she could do with what she had, and that saved me. I made it through that – the parties that ended in gunfire. But they all came together when my mother died when I was 18 from HIV-related illnesses. And after that I could have gone either way, my brother went left and been in and out of jail ever since and I ... went right and used it as an opportunity for growth and decided to not let her die in vain. I said, "I'm going to make sure that her life meant something. I'm going to make sure the world knows Cet's [pronounced "Ket"] son." So my first production is going to be under Cet's Son Productions.

**Considering you're on "The Walking Dead," it's kind of ironic that your one-man show is named "The Resurrection," where you play 18 characters.**

They range from playing everybody from my mother to God. The scene I have with my mother, it's me as a 17-year-old when she told me she contracted HIV. It was an interesting scene because when I was in my mid-20s, I'm married with two kids and I was in the bathroom at 3 in the morning and I saw an apparition of my mother and she explained why she was physically and verbally abusive toward me explaining her childhood and upbringing. That brought a need to forgive her and I just listened. In the show, I revisited this moment because I knew had she lived we would have had that moment eventually to repent in a sense. We touch on that and when she told me she had HIV, and she says it jokingly because she didn't know how to express something like that I was raised to keep

...reason... reason... reason... to express something like that... I had raised to keep things on the inside – we all were. I played the hoochie momma, I played the thug, I play the crack addict and the character named "do dirty" who is the nemesis in my show. That comes full circle and shows a message of karma – what goes around comes around – and it was because of certain things that the character IronE had done in his past that come back to haunt him. But I'm glad in real life it was a different outcome than what we see in the show. The overall theme of the show is truth and love. I preach that you can't have one without the other.

**When did you come up with the name IronE?**

In 2000, right before I went to L.A. I needed something to serve as an icebreaker. I needed to tell my story. I'm not here to be an actor, I'm here to tell my story and inspire others. So IronE would become that name, it would serve as the icebreaker.

**It's hard for me to envision IronE the actor from what you mention in your past. How did you get into acting?**

The thing that got me on this path was football, it was the outlet, I used it as my way out of that terrible situation in the homes. I was determined to get my family out. But there were other things along the way that inspired me. When I was 11, there was something called the bounty program and my grandmother and aunt entered me in the program – that was my first taste of acting. I did Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliette* and I liked it. I was going against kids from private schools but I held my own and gave me this extra boost of confidence. So when I got to the 11th grade I wrote a play based on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and entered it in the citywide oratorical contest and I came in second place. My teachers and my grandmother thought I should have won because I was that good.

**As a native, how do you feel about Atlanta and how it's changed?**

Atlanta is home, I love it here. I've been here my whole life. Some people I speak to and they say, "I'm from Atlanta, man. I'm ready to go, I'm tired of Atlanta." And I'm like, "How can you say that?" Of all the places I'd rather live in the state, it's Atlanta, Ga., that's the place.

I was the mascot for nine years. I was the baseball head – Homer. I've probably done every mascot in town. I've done Thrash, but only once, and I've never done Freddy the Falcon, but I've done Texas Pete hot sauce bottle, I've done Scooby Doo. It was during college, I auditioned to be a mascot after I transferred to UGA, so I was Homer from '97 to 2006. During that time, I saw all of Georgia and what it had to offer and like the rural areas and the mountains, the big cities and the coast. Georgia has everything to offer. So in traveling throughout the country and seeing different places ... I realized how special a place Atlanta is. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the States.

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