

Brown

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they were still doing corporal punishment. They were still spanking kids, and that was a foreign concept to me. And there was the heat: it was hotter than I'd ever been before in my life.

What was different about life in North Carolina?

It was a working class community with a lot of factories. People were making good money for a long time but then if a plant closed down everyone would be in crisis. It was an integrated town but it had all-black areas and all-white. It was a culture based on violence. The moment the sun went down people would start fighting. So moving into that culture it's very difficult not to be violent. I wasn't willing to go all the way, so I decided to stay completely away.

When did you start thinking about violence?

My conscience about these kinds of issues was developed pretty early by my dad being in the church and everything I saw. At university I started thinking 'what's the difference between me and some of my friends—smart, talented friends who didn't go to college'. I'd had several friends who were murdered; some murdered each other. So I was in school but a lot of my friends weren't. What was the difference? And I started thinking about families and strength and resilience, and about young black men in particular.

How does poverty hurt children?

Marginalized and disenfranchised people live in a state of engaged trauma. What I mean is that people can be living in a constant state of stress, for example poor kids living in communities where there is a lot of

gang violence. If you grow up in a violent community you might have seen people murdered, and seen people put in prison. That's normal to you.

Say you are a young person whose father is in prison and your mother is working all the time. Then your grandmother dies. To some people that might be a natural transition. But for these kids it's a catastrophe. If it takes away the only stability you have, it's going to take you a lot longer to overcome it. Or if you have post traumatic stress disorder you might be totally shut down

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already. You might have no response and just be flat.

It's a myth that you can raise any kid by yourself. Even two parent families it's a struggle every day. So you often have several single women raising children, and one of them is caring for all those children, and allowing all the other mothers to work. Anything that happens to her impacts all these other families. And an arrest or a death has a huge impact far beyond one family, but for multiple families and for generations.

What do you say to young people who think that reporting crime is snitching?

If you shoot at somebody you shoot to kill, especially when it's random. So, if you witness this and say nothing, why are you protecting somebody who has no regard for

human life? If that person will shoot somebody else, then they will shoot you as well. That person doesn't need your protection.

Snitching is a really a misconstrued concept. It's a code that relates to street life. If two people commit a crime and one gets caught, then snitching is telling to save yourself. That's what it's really about. But if you witness a crime and don't tell that's just not being a good citizen.

These are codes of masculinity that come from the streets. But they get warped when you start using street codes for non-street things. If you don't live in that world these rules don't apply to you.

What's the connection between trauma and violence?

There is so much connection between trauma and domestic violence, particularly in the Black community. When you talk about slavery you talk about violence. We're still dealing with the residual effects of that violence. From the beginning of time violence has been used to control people, dominate them and to get somebody to do what you want them to do. To really understand somebody you have to understand not just where they are now, but where they have been. It's the same with violence in our communities.

What are you working on now?

Right now, I have been working on a project with Pastor Cliff Chappell called LEAP, Leadership Empowerment Action Project. That's with Black churches and domestic violence. We are working with men and women trying to put a dent in some of the violence in the black community.



Andrae Brown

The most important thing is to recognize that violence is taught and learned and reinforced. And it can be unlearned. People are not just violent. So to stop it, you have to figure out where the root of that is coming from and address those root causes of violence. If you are coming from pain you have got to heal that pain. If your violence comes from feeling isolated or marginalized then you have to stop that marginalization and heal that trauma. We spend a lot of time trying to punish violence but very little trying to heal the trauma and the root causes.

How well do we deal with sex education?

Not very well, because most of us don't handle sexuality very well when we were teens. That includes sexual identity issues as well as sexuality. We leave kids out here alone to deal with sex and relationships themselves.

Contact LEAP of Faith at 360-281-5205

Read the rest of this story online at www.theskanner.com



Quarthey

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TSN: Here at *The Skanner News* we get a lot of books by African and African American authors but very few are published by mainstream publishing houses. So what was your journey in getting this published by Random House – it's your second novel?

Quarthey: Yes, the first was "Wife of the Gods." It's been a long journey. I guess I should go all the way back to childhood, when I started writing novellas and short stories. I was very much stimulated by the number of books in my house. My parents were both university lecturers in Ghana, and I was educated by the number of both fiction books and non-fiction books in the house. So I always wanted to write, and the mystery genre has always been my favorite. I had a number of characters – one James Bond-ish type guy, I always had a group of kids who went around solving mysteries. So it really started then and really persisted all the way through my teens. It took a back seat to medicine, which I studied and got my MD at Howard University.

So it wasn't until after I got out of med school that my writing was rekindled. And that's when I started sending out stuff to multiple agents and getting back rejection letters – of which there were probably hundreds.

For a while I was writing stuff based in Los Angeles, some thrillers, and nothing was really gelling. And it just happened that at the turn of the millennium, around 2000, I was in Paris and just for a couple days and I was in hotel rooms, and I came across this program on French TV which dealt with a local detective in Ivory Coast who's trying to solve a mystery in a village. And what he was doing was using the superstitions and beliefs in magical powers of the local peo-

ple, trying to trick them into confessing or stating what they had seen as witnesses. I was really intrigued, having grown up in Ghana since I was 18 or so I was aware of some of these beliefs.

I want to put Ghana on the crime fiction map

-Kwei Quarthey MD



I thought – if I could write that kind of story, and make it a murder mystery, and set it in Ghana.

And that's when the first idea came for "The Wife of the Gods."

TSN: So the girls are indentured because of things their families did years ago?

Quarthey: Sometimes even generations ago. The idea is to get the protection of the gods, and to give these children over. So in that setting mixing it up with these magical beliefs and why bad things happen to good people, which is a question that more Africans ask than, say, Americans ask is, say, why did this happen to me? Not so much how?

So that book deals with that aspect.

And the second book, "Children of the Streets," is a little bit more of an urban modern 21st century story that deals maybe a little less with tradition but certainly there is one aspect that is covered, and that is proverbs. Anybody who reads this book sees that proverbs become an important part of the story. African proverbs specifically.

TSN: And then you have another book coming out next year.

Quarthey: I'm hoping it will be next year, if I can persuade Random House to work that fast on it. I'm working on a novel that I'm tentatively calling "Men of the Rig," and this deals with the brave new world of oil exploration which is underway in Ghana, which is producing oil since December, 2010, and of course the issue is, is this really going to create a new Ghana, or is it going to be much the same story as gold exploration, which does not enrich the lives of even the people in those gold-mining towns, so in other words, do it like Norway, which knows how to handle its oil production, or do like Nigeria, which is a mess, basically.

TSN: Who are your inspirations?

Quarthey: I think the first inspiration is certainly Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation, Sherlock Holmes, because he's really the prototype, along with Allen Poe's creations as well, of testing, looking for small things that give something away. His character actually is based on Arthur Conan Doyle's character the Professor, Dr. Joseph Bell, who could always tell a lot about a person by observing what he wears or how he walks or what mud was on his shoes or something like that. So testing, or observation, is a central point in my books. My hero Darko Dawson, has in that regard, an ability called synesthesia in which he is able to perceive certain senses by another sense. For example when he hears a voice he can actually feel it – either wet, or dry and prickly – and this gives him the ability sometimes to catch people out in a lie.

He also is keen observer of people and their behavior. So Sherlock Homes comes

through in that way. And I think even subliminally Sherlock Holmes comes through because, as many people know, he had an addiction to cocaine, and Darko Dawson's addiction is marijuana.

TSN: So are you a doctor now?

Quarthey: I'm an internist but through years of training I've moved my interest to chronic wound care, so I'm a specialist in chronic wound care and I do emergency medicine as well.

One of the things I definitely want to do is put Ghana on the crime fiction map. So if we're familiar with our heroes, some of whom are associated with specific cities – Phillip Marlowe in Los Angeles, who is the creation of Raymond Chandler, the classic noir writer, and then we have the more modern day ones – Harry Bosch from Michael Connolly's great creation is also in Los Angeles.

I feel that I was Akkra, and generally Ghana, to enter into that panoply of detective cities – that's the first thing. We do have some examples from South Africa, specifically Botswana and the Republic of SA. Of course I'm referring to the Number One Ladies Detective Agency, which is a different kind of mystery by the way – it's soft. And then we have Michael Stanley's creation, Detective Kubu. And then we do have one writer whose name escapes me but his character is based in Benin but he goes to different countries on the west coast – he is white, so I think there's a difference there as well. Because my heritage is not only American, but it's also African and Ghanaian.

Find out more about Quarthey's books on his website, <http://www.kweiquarthey.com/>