

Alice Walker: The ‘Beauty in Truth’ Interview

Alice Walker has been defined as one of the key international writers of the 20th Century. She made history as the first African-American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction as well as the National Book Award in 1983 for her novel *The Color Purple* — one of the few literary books to capture the popular imagination and leave a permanent imprint. The award-winning novel served as the inspiration for Steven Spielberg’s 1985 film and was adapted for the stage, opening at New York City’s Broadway Theatre in 2005, and capturing a Tony Award for best leading actress in a musical in 2006.

An internationally celebrated author, poet and activist, Alice’s books include seven novels, four collections of short stories, four children’s books, and volumes of essays and poetry. She has written many other best sellers, too, among them, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), which detailed the devastating effects of female genital mutilation and led to the 1993 documentary *Warrior Marks*, a collaboration with the British-Indian filmmaker Pratibha Parmar, with Walker as executive producer.

In 2001, Alice was inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame and, in 2006, she was honored as one of the inaugural inductees into the California Hall of Fame. In 2007, her archives were opened to the public at Emory University.

In 2010, she presented the keynote address at The 11th Annual Steve Biko Lecture at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, and was awarded the Lennon/Ono Grant for Peace, in Reykjavik, Iceland. Alice donated the financial award to an orphanage for the children of AIDS victims in Kenya.



CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

by Kam Williams

She has served as a jurist for two sessions of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, and writes a regular blog on her website: www.alice-walkersgardens.com. Here, she talks about her career and about the documentary “Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth” which premieres on PBS on Friday, February 7th at 9 p.m. ET/PT (check local listings)

Kam Williams: Hi Alice. I’m so honored to have this opportunity to interview you.

Alice Walker: Oh, I’m so glad to be talking with you, too, Kam.

oh, that was a long time ago.

KW: I’ll be mixing in my questions with some from readers. Harriet Pakula-Teweles asks: how do you feel about having the biopic coming out about you?

AW: Well, it’s very interesting because I almost never do anything for Black History Month, because I feel it’s just another way to separate us. It’s amusing to me that it would be coming out as a Black History presentation on PBS. But on the level of the film, I like it. And I love the producer [Shaheen Haq] and the filmmaker [Pratibha Parmar]. I think they were incredibly devoted. They did it on a hope and a prayer, and at one point had to rely on crowd-sourcing because of the huge expenses.

KW: I learned so much about you from the film. For instance, I was surprised to hear that Howard Zinn had been a professor of yours in college.

AW: He was already teaching at Spelman when I arrived as a freshperson. Then, I took his class the following year, because I had gone to the Soviet Union and wanted to learn more about Russia, and I think he was the only person in all of Atlanta who knew anything about Russian literature, which I loved. He was teaching Russian literature, the language, and some of the politics. We became really good friend when I took his class, but then he was fired.

KW: For doing more than just teaching.

AW: He helped us desegregate Atlanta. That was moving because he took a lot of abuse for that. He and Staughton Lynd, a fellow professor who was also from the North, stood with us. They were certainly behind us. In fact, they



Alice Walker

often stood in front of us. This had a huge impact on me. But one of the reasons I was very careful about speaking about the relationship I had with him and Staughton was because, in a racist society, if you acknowledge a deep love for and a deep debt owed to white teachers, they tend to discredit your own parents and your own community. And I was very unhappy about that because I come from somewhere and from specific black people in the South, including my parents, who built our first school, and rebuilt it after it was burned to the ground. And they used to bake pies and cakes to raise money to keep it going. So, I learned to struggle from a very early way in a way that was truly indigenous to the South. You have to keep at it! [Chuckles]

KW: The film also left me with an appreciation of your deep connection to nature. I have that, too. I go for a walk in the woods every day. It’s very spiritual to me.

AW: The forest is the first cathedral. I felt that from the time I was a child. I credit my mother with that. I used to think it came from her Native-American side. Whichever it was, she instinctively

connected with nature, and taught me that. Church just could not hold my spirit. It was a beautiful, little church, too. As sweet as could be. It was at a bend in the road, with a big, oak tree sheltering it. Still, I wandered right out the window, mentally and emotionally, got into the trees, and never left.

KW: Kate Newell says: I’m more than awestruck about this opportunity to ask you a question. How did you feel about the screen adaptation of *The Color Purple*?

AW: I was worried about the film at first, because I’d never had a movie made of any of my work on a big scale like that. There had only been a couple of small, student efforts before that. *The Color Purple* was so overwhelming that I actually brought a magic wand to New York City for the premiere, and pointed it at the screen in the hope that movie didn’t embarrass all of us. Lo and behold, it turned out to be a beautiful picture. The audience was so into it, gracious and emotional, laughing when they should be laughing, crying when they should be crying. I got

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SEATTLE 2014

Saturday February 1

Wednesday February 5



If you have an event you want to share with the community, email it two weeks in advance to *The Skanner* at info@theskanner.com

Thursday January 30

SWEETHEART BOUNCEFEST. Bring your little sweetheart to Bouncefest. Carnival games, face painting, carnival tickets .50 ea. Or you may purchase an unlimited wristband. 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. Loyal Heights Community Center, 2101 NW 7th St. Seattle, WA 98117

HANDS ON SKILLS FAIR. Folks from our neighborhoods have stepped up to share skills such as food preservation, gluten-free and much more. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Meadowbrook Community Center, 10517 35th Ave. NE Seattle, WA 98125

SUPERBOWL FUN 5K RUN/WALK. Come out and support the Seahawks with fellow fans. Free for all to take part in. 10 a.m. Greenlake, 7201 E. Greenlake Dr. N. Seattle, WA 98115

Tuesday February 4

HER VISION, HER VOICE. Do you want a change and be heard? Check-out Her Vision, Her voice – it’s an all-new, free group for girls who want to change their world and have fun along the way. For ages 5 – 18. 4 p.m. NewHolly Library, 7058 32nd Ave. S. Seattle

FREE TAX PREPARATION. Out teen computer lab will have tax experts who are ready and willing to help you file your taxes for free. 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Rainier Community Center, 4600 38th Ave. S. Seattle, WA 98118

Sunday February 9

THE SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN ODYSSEY. Join NW Tap Connection and Color Lines Dance Ensemble for a celebration of cultural heritage through dance, song, and spoken word. 3 p.m. – 4 p.m. Central Library, 1000 Fourth Ave. Seattle, WA

KIDS CLUB: VALENTINE’S SWEETS & CRAFTS. Kids ages 7 – 12 are invited to decorate Valentine’s cookies and create some cards. 2 p.m. Whole Foods Market Lynnwood, 2800 196th St. SW. Lynnwood, WA 98036 Contact store to register.