

The evolution of a Mississippi writer

BY MEREDITH COLEMAN MCGEE
JA Contributing Writer

When I was in my 20s, I was an avid fiction reader, who aspired to become a published author. One day in 1991, I submitted a short story in a contest to *Ebony Magazine* about a girl taking a trip to her grandmother's house. I did not win the contest. I was not crushed that I did not win. In fact, I started drafting a novel in the middle of the crack cocaine epidemic.

At that time, I owned and ran a convenience store called Sunrise Foods #11. I never completed the novel. But I stayed the course as far as writing was concerned. In 1992, I sent a story to the *Jackson Advocate* newspaper. The publisher, Charles Tisdale, ran my story. I was so excited. I clipped the article and showed it to everyone. People in the community were proud. My mother was especially pleased. She encouraged her four children to write. The four of us started writing poetry when we were teenagers.

I continued reading for pleasure which exposed me to stories and storytelling styles. Sometimes, I read historical fiction which prompted me to research actual events. Alice Walker introduced me to Patrice Lumumba and Zora Neal Hurston. The writings of Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, J. California Cooper, and others taught me new aspects of the Black experience. As I got older, I started reading more nonfiction, particularly memoirs and biographies. I enjoyed reading the books and comparing notes with the Hollywood movie version. For example, I read *I, Tina: My Life Story* before I saw *What's Love Got To Do With It*.

In October of 1993, after five years, I closed my convenience store. In November, I became an account executive for the *Mississippi Link*, a new Black newspaper. I was not good at sales. I resigned. Then, I asked for a job at the *Jackson Advocate*, the oldest existing Black-owned newspaper in Mississippi, and started at once in December of 1993. That was a turn of events for me as a writer. I was trained to write newspaper stories. There was teamwork to proof the paper. On my next two jobs, I became the assistant editor of the company's newsletter. I continued from time to time to contribute articles for the *Jackson Advocate*. Our working

relationship has spanned over 25 years so far.

In January of 2003, I started Typing Solutions Résumés & Etc., a typing, resume, and writing service. In 2004, I obtained a Master's in Rural Community Development & Public Policy. I wrote a Capstone Project consisting of three chapters in partial fulfillment of my degree. Writing a manuscript with three chapters in APA style format was a big learning curve. Regardless of my imperfections, I was growing. Eventually, clients asked me to proofread academic manuscripts. Of the 32 books published at Meredith Etc., eight of the manuscripts were typed through my typing service.

One day, Willa Womack, the

story. I had never drafted a book. But as the saying goes, "There is a first Sunday in every month." I accepted the task. I figured it all out. My sister Evalyn always says, "How do you eat an elephant?" Answer, "One bit at a time." I interviewed Mrs. Collier. She responded through a tape recorder. I transcribed her responses from the tapes into a computer-generated file. I traveled to her hometown of Heidelberg, Jasper County, Mississippi, and interviewed her relatives and searched the dates connected to her family history at the church burial grounds. We went to the courthouse and obtained copies of land deeds and I obtained census records.

I was interviewing people for



Meredith McGee (right) and Shirley Sherrod selling books at the International Civil Rights Museum in Jonesboro, NC in November 2013.

owner of Classic Printing on historic Farish Street, gave me a referral for a typing job. I went to her office, and she introduced me to Darlene Collier. Mrs. Collier had a stack of yellow writing pads from the floor to her knees. She had been journaling for years. I read the tablets and realized I was looking at a writing job rather than a typing job. We sat in my living room and discussed her story. It only took 10 or 15 minutes to discover her story was in her head.

I was really fascinated with her

the biography I wrote on my uncle James Meredith during the same time. Believe it not, it took about four years to complete the research process for Mrs. Collier's memoir. The result was a manuscript which we named *Married to Sin* by Darlene D. Collier with Meredith C. McGee. I had watched a lifetime movie called *Married to the Mob*. I told Mrs. Collier I had a great name for our book. She loved it.

In 2011, I obtained a list of literary agents and contacted them

one by one. We sent a book proposal, a query letter, and the manuscript *Married to Sin* out. However, we did not find anyone willing to take our manuscript. We gave up on agents and sent the book proposal and query letters to mid to large size publishing houses. Mrs. Collier was not discouraged when we obtained our first rejection letter. It said something like, "You have a great story. It is not a good fit for our publishing house."

After receiving five rejection letters, Mrs. Collier had had enough. She decided we were wasting our time sending letters out. Sometimes we had to wait 30 to 60 days to get a "no," even though we had supplied a SASE in our package. It was a tedious process. Mrs. Collier suggested we start a publishing company. I couldn't believe she wanted to start a company. We did. We named it Mose Dantzer Press for her great grandfather Mose Dantzer. He was the largest Black landowner in Jasper County. He bought 243 acres in 1905 from the City of New Orleans. The brother of my friend Mily translated *Married to Sin* into Spanish which is named *Casada El Pecado*. My sister-in-law Nancy edited the translations.

Mrs. Collier and I had different visions. So, our publishing road ended. As the acquisition editor of Mose Dantzer Press, I acquired two manuscripts - *Starkishia: Estrella* and *Odyssey*. However, Mrs. Collier changed her mind about adding new titles to Mose Dantzer Press. I filed the paperwork to close Mose Dantzer Press. Then, I formed Meredith Etc., February 9, 2013, and took those two manuscripts with me. Fast forward nine years, Meredith Etc. has produced 32 books with 20 authors. One book by the 21st author is slated to be released next month.

Married to Sin was my first published work. A lot happened since then. I am now the author of five full-length books and six children's books. It took 24 years from the time I aspired to become an author at age 24 to the year I became a published author at age 48. My uncle, James Meredith, always says, "Life is a process." It is.

Search Meredith Coleman McGee on Barnes & Noble or Amazon to buy my works. Visit <https://meredithetc.com/> to buy Meredith Etc. books.

Dear Silas continuation from page 1A

count including a recent one with John Legend hopping on the trend.

Dear Silas is no stranger to virality on the internet. In 2019, his song "Skrr Skrr" went viral when a fan used the song in an equally popular Dexter's Laboratory meme. At the beginning of the pandemic, his freestyle to the viral "Wipe It Down" trend, created by BMW Kenny, garnered 10 million views. When Cookiee Kawaii's "Vibe (If I Back it Up)" went viral, 1.7 million people watched Dear Silas' Sailor Moon-inspired freestyle to the song. More than 2.7 million saw his freestyle to the Hip Hop Harry trend, and his freestyle to @yungbbq dancing to Missy Elliott's "I Can't Stand the Rain" reached the consummate entertainer herself.

Additionally, TikTok user @thouston228 created an original sound of Ward 3 Councilman Kenneth Stokes talking to WAPT and other Jackson-area media about allegations from Jackson Mayor Chokwe Lumumba that Stokes had taken bribes. The clip is a soundbite of Stokes saying, "He need to leave that dope alone." Though TikTok users around the globe may not know the situation behind the now viral sound, there have been more than 11,600 videos of it made on the app.

Shanique Brown (@shaniqueimari) was featured on the Netflix series "The Ultimatum." Along with five other couples, Brown and her boyfriend, Randall Griffin, risked their relationships by giving out ultimatums to commit to marriage or move on. Griffin proposed at the end of the experiment but, ultimately, the couple decided to hold off on the engagement for the time being. In the video using @thouston228's sound, the two can be seen together in their kitchen with the caption "Me and my man unpacking the tea as soon as we get home from every event." The video has been seen almost 650,000 times.

Also TikTok verified is Keith Lee (@keith_lee125), a pro MMA fighter and married father of two who gained popularity for his instructional food preparation, food reviews, and family vlogs. Lee has over 1.7 million followers and his video has been seen almost 850,000 times. Lee used the sound from his point of view when someone "lose[s] more than 5lbs to (sp) fast in a black household." User @sheso.brattie's video was viewed over 2.7 million times and shows a man eyeing a dish of Toll House Pecan Turtle Delight cookies with Blue Bell Salted Caramel Brownie ice cream.

The resilience and brilliance of Jacksonians seems to reach across the nation and globe. There's anticipation to see what the next best thing to come out of Mississippi's capital city will be.

Election continuation from page 1A

cumbents in Districts 1 and 3 and by Republican newcomer Mike Ezell in the 4th district.

District 1 incumbent Trent Kelly defeated Democrat Dianne Black by a margin of 72-27. Incumbent Michael Guest held on to his seat by defeating Shuwaski Young 71-29 percent.

Fourth District winner Republican Mike Ezell swept past both Democrat Johnny DuPree and Libertarian Party candidate Alden Johnson by capturing 74.1 percent of Tuesday's ballots. Ezell, the former sheriff of Jackson County, claimed a primary victory in June over then-incumbent Steven Palazzo.

CYBER ATTACKS

Several Mississippi state government sites were slowed to a temporary stop by suspected cyberattacks reportedly launched by a Russia based group of hackers.

Mississippi election officials reported a "coordinated cyber-attack Tuesday that disrupted their website's operations periodically through Election Day," Newsweek reported early Wednesday morning. The disruption only affected "external content to voters" and did not involve "any internal elections-related processes," a state official said.

Despite the attacks, Mississippi Secretary of State spokeswoman Elizabeth Holbert Jonson reported, "The election system is secure and has not been compromised."

Another source reported that the Secretary of State's website was flooded with traffic

that overwhelmed its services.

Some websites were knocked offline after what was reported as "distributed denial of service attacks," (DDoS).

"We do not have confirmation as to where the DDoS activity originated," Jonson told *USA Today*.

Newsweek cited "a Russian hacker group" as the culprits, with Mississippi Secretary of State's website as a target. Several other states were also under similar attack, the report said.

Department of Homeland Security officials said that such attacks that flood state websites with computer messages would not affect the actual vote totals. "No specific or credible threat disrupting election results that should cause voters to question the integrity of the election," DHS said.

DEMOCRATIC SURPRISES

John Fetterman's triumph in Pennsylvania's U.S. Senate race was not the only outstanding victory in the state's quest for a strong presence in Washington.

The victory of Pennsylvania State Representative Summer Lee broke through a political glass ceiling herself in her winning the race for Congress in Tuesday's election.

She defeated Republican Mike Doyle, who has the same name as outgoing Mike Doyle, the Democratic incumbent who opted not to run for re-election. Lee will likely join a group of women Progressives already in Congress who are noted for their support for women's rights and an even-handed approach toward the Palestinians

under Israeli occupation.

Lee gained national attention in 2021 when she compared the abuse of Palestinians by Israeli police and military to the treatment of Black Americans by police in many areas of the U.S. During her campaign, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) targeted her because of her support for the Palestinian cause and con-

tributed over a million to her Republican opponent.

Black Democrat Wes Moore won the race for Maryland governor Tuesday and will be the first Black chief of state in Maryland and only the third Black elected governor in U.S. history.

Moore defeated Republican Dan Cox, a fervent Trump supporter, and was congratulated on his victory by incumbent

GOP Gov. Larry Hogan.

In Illinois, Johnathan Jackson, son of Rev. Jesse Jackson, has won election in Illinois' First Congressional District, taking up the seat that until now was held by veteran Congressman Bobby Rush.

In more than 100 Congressional races, Democrats are holding on to a thin margin over Republicans,

and it might be weeks before the final power relationship in Congress will be determined.

"Today has proven that when we utilize our collective power, we can make a real difference," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said Tuesday. "The stakes today were high, but Black voters once again rose to the occasion and refused to be silenced."



Hinds County Chancery Court 5-3 candidates Tametrice Hodges (left with Theresa Kennedy) and Damon Stevenson and Shuwaski Young, candidate for Congressional District 3, held watch parties November 8; a poll worker delivers ballots to the Hinds County Election Commission. (Advocate photos by Joshua Martin)