

West makes her writing dreams a reality

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Since she was a child in Brooklyn, N.Y., Darby West has dreamed of becoming an author. From novels to short stories, poetry to story telling, West has dabbled in literature for decades, and compiled a rather impressive list of titles.

"I can't think of anything that I'd rather do besides writing," she commented. "I've known probably all my life that I wanted to write."

Now, with the founding of her publishing company, Special Touch Ink, and the release of her second novel, "The Monkey and the Crocodile," West is finally on her way.

"When I was growing up, I liked to read people like James Baldwin and Maya Angelou - these are the classic novels," she said. "I'm trying to write books that ... 15, 20, 30 years from now, somebody's still going to be reading."

Despite the obvious passion West has for her craft, she readily admits that realizing her lifelong ambition has been anything but easy.

"I tried to get my first book published ... about 13, 14 years ago," she explained. "I ended up with like 300 rejection letters, trying to get an agent. I finally gave up."

Although she had abandoned her aspirations to have her work published, West continued to write. To date, she has authored over 14 adult novels, seven children's books, 50 short stories, a book of poetry and one young adult novel.

"When I wake up at 5:30 in the morning to get my son up, I write down everything that I want to do that day," West remarked. "One of the things that I know I'm going to have to do is write. I write something every day, even if it's just a chapter in one of my books."

Her luck changed in 2004, when she discovered a print on demand company. Drawing money from her retirement fund, West published her first novel - drafted nearly 20 years before - entitled, "Through the Fire."

Though writing had come easy to her, publishing presented many challenges, as West soon learned.

"I had to set up my own book in the format it needs to be in for them to print it," she recounted. "I had to design my own cover; I had to do everything. I'd get 10 free books and when I wanted to sell a book, I had to order them from this company. They make the money and the writer really doesn't."

After the publication of "Through the Fire," West began to explore other printing options and decided to publish her next novel herself. She established Special Touch Ink printing company in 2005, and published "The Monkey and the Crocodile" late last year.

Based on a widely known African folk tale by the same name, "The Monkey and the Crocodile" carries a powerful message.

The story is centered around a successful Broadway actress and author named Ronni, and the struggles she encounters as she searches for her "Mr. Right."

"We do need to be honest with each other when we're in a relationship," West said of the book's underlying moral. "We have to express what it is that we want and if the other person is not willing to give us that then we don't need to try to play games and manipulate anyone, change anybody. Move on to the next person if what you need is not what this person has to offer you."

West says she draws inspiration for her story lines from friends and personal experience, and that writing allows her to express herself in a meaningful way.

West's 12-year-old son, Brandon McMickens, has joined her as a published author, with the release of his first storybook, "TJ the Snow Kid."

She describes the feeling of sharing her passion with her son as excellent and says she hopes to help other young people become authors as well.

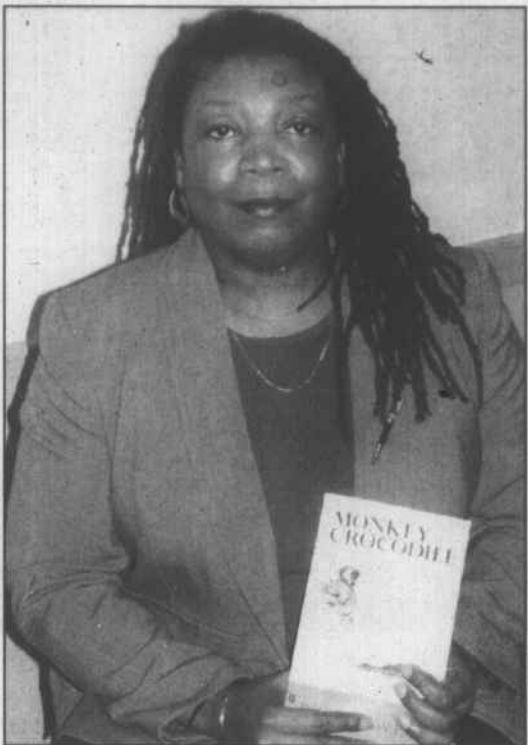
"I have developed a workshop for children that are interested in writing. I just haven't presented the information to the school system yet," she commented. "There are a lot of kids that I've met when I go around telling stories that write and that have little stories that they've written. Eventually I would like to start publishing some of these young children."

The release of "The Monkey and the Crocodile" was just the beginning, West says, readers can expect a flurry of new Special Touch Ink publications in the near future.

"I would like to release a book every four months, starting now," she remarked. "I knew I couldn't do that when I was sending stuff off to a print on demand company, but with me having full control of my business, then I know I can do that."

"The Monkey and the Crocodile" is available online, at www.thatstouchink.com and www.rjcommunications.com. It was dedicated to "all storytellers ... people that know they're telling a story and those who sit on their front porch lying - telling a story but don't really know it."

West will be at the Malloy/Jordan East Winston Heritage Library on Tuesday, Jan. 16 at 7 p.m. for a book signing. For details, contact the library at 336-703-2950.



Darby West holds a copy of her book.

Photo by Layla Farmer

News Clips

Compiled from staff, wire and submitted reports

City to recycle x-mas trees through Jan. 31

The city will recycle your old Christmas tree and put it to good use as mulch for its parks and roadsides.

Residents in single family homes inside the city limits can put their Christmas trees at the curb for pick-up by city brush crews. All lights, decorations, stands and nails must be removed from trees. Please be patient; it may take several weeks to collect all the trees.

People who live in apartments, who live outside the city limits or who dispose of their trees quickly can take them to the following recreation centers for recycling through January 31:

- Crawford Park, 4226 Oak Ridge Dr.
- Hanes Hosiery Recreation Center, 501 Reynolds Blvd.
- Hanes Park (tennis court parking lot), 625 West End Blvd.
- Little Creek Recreation Center, 610 Foxcroft Dr.
- Old Town Recreation Center (tennis court parking lot), 4550 Shattalon Dr.
- Parkland Park (tennis courts), 1660 Brewer Rd.
- Polk Park (swimming pool parking lot), 1850 Polo Rd.
- Salem Lake (at the gate), 1001 Salem Lake Rd.
- Sprague Street Recreation Center, 1350 E. Sprague St.
- Winston Lake (swimming pool parking lot), 3535 Winston Lake Rd.

For more information about drop-off locations, call the Vegetation Management Division at 748 3020.

N.C. insurance rates remain low

Insurance Commissioner Jim Long recently announced

that North Carolina continues to stand out as the state with lowest auto insurance rates east of the Mississippi, coming in as 5th lowest in the nation. The rankings are gleaned from a report by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) which compares the costs of personal automobile insurance in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, based on 2004 data.

While some states shifted rankings, North Carolina remained steady in the number five spot. Noteworthy in this distinction is that North Carolina is, according to census reports, the most populous state to enjoy a spot in the top 10 lowest states to rank in the NAIC's report. Other states with low auto insurance rates have a significantly less dense population than North Carolina, which contributes to their lower rates.

Medical School in exchange program with Brazil

Wake Forest University School of Medicine is the lead United States partner in a new program for university student and faculty exchange between Brazil and the U. S. The program was recently announced by the U.S. Department of Education.

Wake Forest will partner with Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, and two historically African-American institutions: Central State University in Ohio and Winston-Salem State University. Participants in the program wish to advance the exchange of faculty and students in the biomedical sciences.

A consortium of educational institutions in each country has received a four-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). (In the U.S., the grant totals \$209,586.) The goal is to provide student interchange including a better understanding of cultural differences. Activities will include development of language skills in Portuguese for the U.S. students studying in Brazil and English for the Brazilian students in the U.S. The focus will be on students in the sciences with courses tai-

lored to their individual programs and a practical research experience.

Debra I. Diz, Ph.D., director of the program and professor in the Hypertension & Vascular Disease Center,

says "We recognized that international training of under-

represented minority students lags behind that of the general student population. In both the U.S. and Brazil, efforts to increase minority student participation in biomedical research are under way and this program will emphasize our commitment to reducing cultural barriers to these opportunities."

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Warm water exercises

The Shepherd's Center is offering a new Warm Water Class beginning Jan. 17 at Arbor Acres Retirement Community, 1240 Arbor Road. This class will be held every Wednesday from 11 a.m.-noon and is an addition to regularly scheduled classes.

All classes will be led by Mona Hardimon and offered through the Shepherd's Center. The cost covers one class for eight weeks. Cost per class: \$32 for Shepherd's Center volunteers and members and \$40 for all others. To register and for more information, call 336-748-0217.

Omega talent hunt contest

The Omega Psi Phi Talent Hunt Contest will be held March 11 at Winston-Salem State University. All music students in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 are eligible. First place is \$300, second place is \$200 and third place is \$100. The music must be memorized. Contact Emory Jones at 336-655-1019 or e-mail emoryjones1@hotmail.com for an application. Deadline for applications is March 3, 2007.

N.C. license plates will be getting a makeover

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

RALEIGH - North Carolina's vehicle license plates will soon be getting a makeover by the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles. In April, DMV will begin replacing existing plates with an updated version. The oldest plates will be replaced first.

"Removing old plates from our roads will increase the safety and security of our drivers and provide law enforcement agencies with an updated identification tool," Commissioner of Motor Vehicles George Tatum said.

Tatum said that many of the 8.4 million vehicles operating in North Carolina carry license plates that are well over 20 years old. Their legibility and reflectivity have deteriorated, making identification difficult for law enforcement officers, he said.

DMV expects to replace more than 600,000 of the oldest plates during the first year of the program, with another 500,000 plates to be replaced in 2008. These plates have been identified by issue dates and sequence numbers. DMV will continue replacing older plates each year afterwards based on available funding. The division received about \$1.2 million from the legislature in the 2006 session to



George Tatum

begin making the change. Owners with registrations

identified for plate replacement will be notified with their renewal notices. They will be automatically issued a new plate. Owners renewing registrations through the mail or via the Internet will be mailed a new plate and registration sticker. The cost of vehicle registration will remain the same.

The new standard plates for private automobiles will continue the "First in Flight" design, but will carry red letters and numbers rather than the blue letters and numbers now in use. Owners will be encouraged to take their old plates to license plate agencies for recycling, keeping them out of landfills.

84% of incarcerated youths have trouble communicating.
74% of adult prisoners have trouble reading.

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Celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. 01.15.07

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