

BETTER THAN FICTION

Bestselling author shares his story of success

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

On the eve of the ninth annual Bookmarks Festival of Books and Authors (where he was slated to be among the featured attractions), bestselling author Carl Weber visited Winston-Salem State University, where he shared the novel-worthy story of his own life.

Weber, who has penned more than a dozen novels, shares his passion for literacy with the world through his own work, and through that of countless other authors, whose titles appear in his two bookstore chains, Urban Knowledge and Beach Reads, and his publishing company, Urban Books. Though he has mastered the elusive art of finding financial success through writing, Weber said he never imagined he would become an author.

"I wasn't trained to be an author," he revealed. "... I was trained as a business person."

Weber, who holds an MBA in marketing from the University of Virginia, spent five years working at the KPMG tax firm before opening his first bookstore. From his post behind the counter, Weber said he learned some valuable lessons, including what readers really want in books: short "juicy" chapters.

"Every chapter needs to be a story," he said. "... The chapter becomes engaging and it makes the person want to read the next chapter."

During his Sept. 6 address, Weber offered humorous cautionary tales and pearls of wisdom gained from his journey as an author. The Long Island, N.Y. resident told the audience, — a collection of current and former WSSU students, faculty and members of the community — that he didn't consider writing until the day the author of a book Weber called "horrible" arrived at a book signing in a brand new "candy apple red" Mercedes.

"I'm looking at him, I'm going. 'You got that car from this book?' and he said, 'Yeah.'" he related. "That was the night I went home to write a book."

Weber has enjoyed considerable success. He recently released his 18th novel, "The Man in 3B," which Weber says is the story of "a thug you can take home to your mama," and "The Family Business," a saga he affectionately refers to as his "black 'Sopranos,'" is soon to be a television series, starring Victoria's Secret model Selita Ebanks, G-Unit's Olivia and Christian Keyes. Many of his friends and foes have made their way into his books as characters, Weber says, and some of his most negative experiences have translated into big sales.

"You piss me off, I will write a book about you. My baby mama pissed me off, so I wrote a book about her," he declared. "... That book flew off the shelves, man. Wal-Mart was ordering it like it was crack."

Launching and maintaining a career as an author is no easy task, Weber said. In order to be successful, writers must first believe strongly in themselves and the story they are trying to craft, he added.

"To be an author, you've got to have an ego," Weber said. "... Writing books is the absolute hardest form of entertainment in the world; you have to believe in you more than anybody else."

Those words resonated with WSSU senior Myiesha Speight, vice president of the school's Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society and an aspiring author. Speight added that lack of confidence isn't a challenge she expects to face.

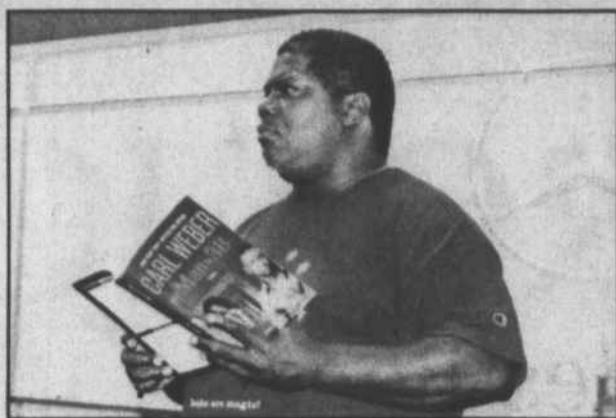


Photo by Layla Garms

(Top) Author Carl Weber holds his latest book as he speaks.

(Right) Nick Gilchrist shows off a book Weber gave him during the presentation.

(Below) Sigma Tau Delta (Theta Mu Chapter) President Chani Ford (left) and Vice President Myiesha Speight.



"If you have one person believing in you, it has to be you," commented the 21 year-old. "You have to be the biggest person in your corner."

Writing requires creativity and perseverance, Weber said.

"You have to sit at the computer every single day, even if you're working on the same doggone paragraph, and that happens a lot," he remarked.

"Don't think you have an original idea — there's no such thing as an original idea when you're writing a novel," Weber added. "It's all been done before, but it's all about how you do it."

The best authors are the ones who know how to take the good with the bad, accepting criticism as it comes, Weber believes.

"You have to be able to take constructive criticism to the ninth degree if you're going to be a good author," he said. "My book is read by 20 people before it gets to the publisher ... that's how you put together a book that people are going to like because now you know all the flaws."

Weber joined the world of novelists during a time that he considers a "golden age" for African American authors, a time when black bookstores were booming and publishers were clamoring for new names to populate the shelves of those who catered to the thriving niche market.

"This was one of the few situations where we were in a better position than just about anybody else in the world," he said. "We became the highest paid group (of authors) from 1996-2008, of any ethnicity. Every publishing company wanted their own black person — it's the truth — and they all went out and

signed somebody."

Times are harder for black authors now, thanks to the rise of e-books, Weber said.

"There used to be somewhere in the neighborhood of 600 black bookstores in the United States. Every major city had one," Weber said. "Now, you can probably count the black bookstores on your hands — maybe there's 15 — and they all went out of business because of Nooks and things, because if electronic books are being downloaded, there's no need to go and patronize the black bookstores."

"You guys are at a disadvantage because there aren't as many bookstores as there used to be, which means you're going to have to work twice as hard as you did in the past," he said.

Speight, a Maryland native, said she believes Weber's advice will serve her well in the future.

"I love hearing from authors because it gives me perspective of what I can do when I start writing and what I'm getting into," she said. "... From what I read, he is a really exceptional author."

WSSU alumnus Nick Gilchrist said hearing from Weber was an empowering experience for him.

"It was really inspirational," said Gilchrist, who graduated in May. "Just being this close to somebody who's been on the New York Times Bestsellers list and seeing he's just a regular guy with some good ideas, that lets me know that it's not such an unattainable goal."

For more information about Weber, visit www.carlweber.net.

Testing

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just so many issues with it."

State Rep. Evelyn Terry, a Democrat who chairs the Forsyth County DSS Board, said she initially spoke against the bill but ended up voting for it.

"The original language did not definitively prevent a local DSS worker from denying benefits to somebody," she said. "... That's why I spoke against it."

A revision of the bill alleviated her concerns and earned her vote.

"When it came through with the markup, it was fixed. I said, 'Okay, I'll support it, as long as children and those persons who need benefits will not be adversely affected ... because I don't want criminals to walk away with benefits they shouldn't have,'" she explained. "It appeared to be amended to not adversely impact those people who needed and qualified for the benefit."

After voting "aye," Terry said she learned that the bill was not necessary because it addressed issues that were already covered under existing state and federal regulations.

Nancy Young, vice chair of the Forsyth County Department of Social Services Board, said the agency already has the ability to test clients if drug abuse is suspected, and that many checks are already in place in the system to address breaches of the government-issued funds.

"These are clients that are interacted with on a



Photo by Todd Luck

Sen. Earline Parmons says the law is bad news.

very regular basis, so if there are issues, our caseworkers are going to notice that, our employers are going to notice that," said Young, director of Public and Media Relations at Winston-Salem State University.

"There are a lot of safeguards in place."

Young likened the law to "trying to kill a flea with a jackhammer."

"I personally have an issue with it because it's saying you're guilty until proven innocent," she stated. "It just bothers me that they would require that."

The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina believes the bill is more than unfair; it says it is likely illegal.

"It's very disappointing that the legislature

put so much effort into passing this cruel and constitutionally-suspect bill. HB 392 does nothing to help those who test positive for drug use get treatment, but it does allow the government to conduct costly, unnecessary and unreasonably intrusive searches of North Carolinians who seek public assistance to care for their families," Sarah Preston, ACLU-NC's policy director, said in a statement. "... Evidence shows that public aid applicants are no more likely to use drugs than the general public, and similar programs in other states have been found to be unconstitutional and fiscally wasteful."

ACLU-NC also highlighted a similar law put in place by Florida legislators in 2011 that was promptly ruled unconstitutional by a federal court.



Young



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