

'Standing at the Scratch Line'

Johnson to sign copies of first novel at Barnes & Noble

BY JERI YOUNG
THE CHRONICLE

Writing may be Guy Johnson's birthright. His family has always been one in which stories flow as naturally as blood ties that bind its members.

His grandfather kept a young Johnson spellbound with stories of his experiences as a soldier during World War I.

Then there are the tales woven by his mother, acclaimed poet Maya Angelou.

The stories told by his grandfather, Bailey Johnson Sr., find their way into the younger Johnson's first novel, "Standing at the Scratch Line." The sweeping epic spans 30 years in the life of King Tremaine, a proud black man unafraid to fight back against racism.

"My grandfather was a man who was in World War I," he said. "He used to tell me stories about what had happened in war. I never saw that supported by anything by history. But I had greater faith in his storytelling than I did in history."

Johnson will sign copies of his book during a discussion at Barnes & Noble Saturday.

"When I look at American literature there seems to be a dearth of material regarding strong black male characters," Johnson said. "There were a lot of strong men in my family. I know strong black men may be an anomaly in American literature, but they are not in American history."

Johnson said the book grew out of his quest to understand his grandfather, a proud man unafraid to use violence to ensure his family's well-being.

"My grandfather was the kind of man who didn't take kindly to being disrespected," he said. "I'm going to be honest. I always thought of my grandfather as a Neanderthal. Now I understand that if there wasn't a man like my grandfather in the family, a man unafraid to fight, black people wouldn't own anything. The law wasn't going to defend their rights. Men like my grandfather stepped in to fill in that gap."

Johnson wove his grandfather's character and experiences into King Tremaine, a World War I veteran, who returns-home to find that service to the nation didn't change black men's status in America.

The images in the book tell the lost history of one of the nation's bloodiest periods. The end of the war marked a period of civil unrest where whites rioted in black communities and lynchings reached their peak.

Johnson spent years researching the period and carefully places Tremaine in racial hotbeds from an ongoing war between blacks and the Mafia in Harlem to the racism that caused the downfall of black townships throughout the nation.

"A lot of people say this is a terribly violent book, but I want people to understand that this book is set at the same time Rosewood was destroyed and black people were killed in Tulsa, Oklahoma," Johnson said. "My son, the only fiction he read was 'Iceberg Slim.' I don't want to put down anybody, but there was a whole lot we didn't know. I want to open his eyes to the black experience beyond the drugs and the exploitation sorts of things."

Through his research, Johnson has become well versed in the atrocities committed against African Americans. But as well as he knows the struggles, he also knows how hard African Americans fought to keep what was theirs. The black community didn't sit idly by while things were taken, he said.

"We fought," Johnson said. "There was no time that black men and women didn't fight. That's one of the fallacies in the way our history is presented. We are not a passive people."

His brash characters and vivid depictions of historical events have struck a chord with readers - particularly black men who far too often see few strong images of themselves in literature.

"I wanted this to be part of American literature, but also part of America's mythology," he said. "White America has its myths. There's Tarzan in the jungles of Africa, no less, taming beast and men. We haven't really had that."

Johnson has already finished his second novel, a sequel to "Standing at the Scratch Line" that explores the relationship between Tremaine and his young grandson. He also is hard at work on a novel about pirates.

He says there's no end to the books he could write.

"There's plenty about black history we don't know," he said. "That's where I find my ideas."

Guy Johnson will sign copies of "Standing at the Scratch Line" at Barnes & Noble Saturday at 3 p.m. Barnes & Noble is located at 1925 Hampton Inn Court.

Sawtooth asst. director blazing trail for African Americans in the arts

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

In a town where the arts are big business, April Horton is an unlikely power player.

The 24-year-old is the assistant director of the Sawtooth Center for Visual Arts, a job which she says is just as exhilarating as it is hectic.

"It's a lot of work, but I also have a lot of fun," Horton said last week from a bench in the art-filled lobby of the Sawtooth.

Her job is as varied as the countless number of sculptures and paintings that line the walls and halls of the Sawtooth Building.

The center usually stages four special events each year. All of the planning and detail that go into the events fall into Horton's lap. She says she learns from each event she plans, though some have taught her harder lessons than others.

"We had Party in the Park in the summer. It was an outdoor music festival that featured seven bands," she recalled. "It was a wonderful event. It was just held on a bad weekend: the Dixie Classic Fair was going on, the Vantage, every home football game that you can imagine."

Keeping an open line of communication between the center, its board and the board of The Arts Council is also one of Horton's responsibilities.

Horton handles many of the day-to-day aspects of running the center.

As an arts management student at Appalachian State University, an internship with the Reynolda House of American Art first brought Horton to Winston-Salem. She says she fell in love with the city and its reputation as the arts mecca of North Carolina.

"I grew to like this area and decided to come back after I graduated (in December 1997)," Horton said.

She moved here knowing only a few people and without a job, but she hit the ground running, dropping off her resume and networking at many of the city's arts agencies. In May 1998, the assistant director position at Sawtooth came through for her.

"I got lucky," she said with a wide smile. "Good arts jobs are hard to find, so you are always very lucky when you find a good one."

Horton's love for the arts was nurtured by her close-knit family back home in Lenoir and in the public school system. She remembers drawing and painting as a little girl. By the time she made it to high school she was so good that she was able to sell a few of her paintings.

"I've always loved the arts," she said.

But when it was time to go to college, Horton said she did not have enough faith in her artistic talent to bank her entire future on selling her paintings.

"I decided that I had talent but not genius, so I went into arts management, something that incorporates business and the arts," she said.

But she has not tossed her brushes and easel. She still paints because she says it's cathartic. She has transformed a room in her apartment into a studio.

Horton grew up with four siblings - Avery, Amy, Ann and Alice. Family friends called the kids the A-team, not only because of their first names, but because the often brought home A's in every subject.

Horton says her mother, a single parent, has always instilled in her children the value of hard work.

"My mother taught us that if you work hard you will make it, and she was right," Horton said.

Four of the A-team, including April Horton, put themselves through college. The youngest sibling is following in her sister's footsteps at ASU.

Her mother's advice even rings true in her hectic career. Though she attends many meetings and functions where she is one of a

very few black faces, Horton says she always does the very best that she can in hopes of blazing trails for others who might come later.

But Horton doesn't buy into the notion that there is no place for African Americans in the arts. That has simply not been her experience, she says.

"There is room for us," she said. "I hope that by myself being here, that helps break down that stereotype."

Horton says often her age and youthful appearance are her biggest barriers.

"I was trying to book security for one of our events and the lady says, 'Honey, I thought you were 14,'" she laughed. "Hopefully people will respect me for my accomplishments and work that I do and judge me on that and not by my appearance. That's the way it should be in any line of work."

Horton is somewhat guarded about her future, except her New Year's resolutions to eat right and exercise more. She says she doesn't like to burden herself with unrealistic goals.

"I just want to take each day as it comes and the best way that I know how," she said.

"I have a lot to learn, and that's my main focus."

Horton says she is always in a hurry these days, but it's a joyful and pleasurable pace at which she moves.

Currently, she is working on "Deck the Sawtooth Halls," a Christmas event that will transform many of the center's studios into a makeshift shopping mall.



Horton

Arts and crafts from the people who take classes at Sawtooth will be on sale to the public at the event.

The proceeds will go to Sawtooth's scholarship fund.

Horton is also planning the center's Founders Day Celebration, which will mark Sawtooth's

55th year of service to the community.

All the hard work is worth it, she said matter-of-factly.

"The Sawtooth has just a unique (niche) in this community. We want to fulfill our mission of being an environment that is fun and enjoyable for everybody."

Welcome
**To Your New,
Customer-Friendly
Mortgage Center.**



We're Changing The Way Home Loans Are Done!

We meet *YOUR* needs and promise you: • Great Rates • Low Fees & Closing Costs • No Hassles • Easy Processing • Quick Approvals • Easy-To-Understand Options • Expert, Friendly Guidance.
After all ... you wouldn't expect anything less from a good neighbor.

**Southern
Community
BANK AND TRUST**
Small Enough To Care

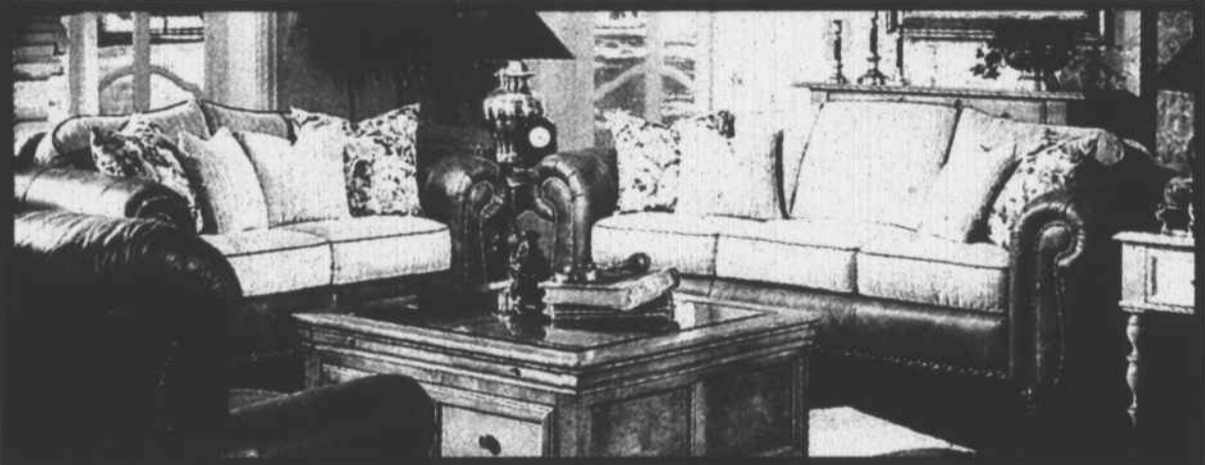
Winston-Salem: • Country Club Bld. 768-8500 • Stratford Bld. 734-2075 • Peters Creek Pky. 785-3570
• University Pky. 377-2239 • Yarnall Center: • Yadkinville 679-4121
www.scbtrust.com • Touchtone Banking 1-800-813-7623

Member
FDIC

After Thanksgiving Sale.

From Friday 'Til Monday You
Can Gobble Up Savings at
La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries.®

This holiday season, show your guest a beautiful new home. Yours. Come to La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries today and you'll find the area's largest selection of quality La-Z-Boy® sofas, love seats,



The Lancer Reclining Chair
\$399⁹⁵



The Forte Leather Reclining Chair
\$699⁹⁵



The Ashley Reclining Chair
\$299⁹⁵



The Bennett Chaise Recliner
\$399⁹⁵

recliners, sleep sofas, sectionals, chairs, entertainment centers, tables and more. All priced to move.

You can shop with confidence because the sales staff at La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries is second to none. From design assistance to financing options, we're out to make furniture shopping worry-free. So hurry to the After Thanksgiving Sale because we don't want any leftovers.

**HURRY,
SALE ENDS SOON!**

**LA-Z-BOY
FURNITURE GALLERIES**

WINSTON-SALEM:
700 Hanes Mall Blvd. at the Pavillions
Mon. thru Fri. 10 am-8 pm, Sat. 10 am-6 pm,
Sun. 1 pm-5 pm
(336) 765-3336

90 DAYS SAME AS CASH

WE MAKE THE ROOMS THAT MAKE A HOME

THE CHRONICLE

**News Deadline is
Monday at
5 p.m.**

INDEX

OPINION	A6
SPORTS	B1
RELIGION	B6
CLASSIFIEDS	B9
HEALTH	C3
ENTERTAINMENT	C7
CALENDAR	A9

This Week In Black History...

Nov. 25, 1941 - Annie Mae Bullock is born in Nutbush, Tenn. In the early '50s, the talented teen-ager will meet singer Ike Turner in a Saint Louis nightclub. Turner will transform Bullock into sultry singer Tina Turner.

Nov. 25, 1955 - The Interstate Commerce Commission bans segregation on bus travel. The law affects buses as well as terminals and restrooms.

Nov. 26, 1968 - University of Southern California running back O.J. Simpson captures the Heisman Trophy.

Dec. 1, 1955 - Rosa Parks defies the segregated transportation ordinances of Montgomery, Ala., by taking a seat in the front of a city bus. Her actions will spark at 382-day bus boycott which signals the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.

The Chronicle's
e-mail address
is:
wschron@netu
nlimited.net