

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

>> This is Sheryl Cannady at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 11th year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington DC to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival will be two days this year. Saturday, September 24th, 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. And Sunday, September 25th 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Free and open to the public, the festival will take place between 9th and 14th streets on the National Mall, rain or shine. For more details visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it is my pleasure to introduce award-winning author Terry McMillan, who's latest book is titled "Getting to Happy." A sequel to her number one best selling novel "Waiting to Exhale." Ms. McMillan, thank you so much for joining us.

>> Thank you.

>> At the.

>> Happy to be here.

>> Well, thank you. [Inaudible]

>> At the end of "Waiting to Exhale," many readers expected the four friends to find happiness. And yet, in "Getting to Happy," they're still grappling to find the elusive happy ever after. How have the four girlfriends fared over the last 15 years?

>> Well, I'll put it this way. I -- you know, I don't think -- I don't believe in fairy tails. And the women, 15 years after "Waiting to Exhale" have had to go through their ups and downs like everybody else in the real world does. And I think that -- right now I think they're just a little -- they're more mature. And they are really thinking about the meaning of what's happening to them. Versus just reacting to what's happening to them -- to themselves.

>> Age enhances the flavor of wine. But in this youth-oriented society, is that true for your protagonists in "Getting to Happy"? You mention that they're more mature.

>> As opposed to just reacting to things that happen to them. They are, in fact, trying to be a lot more proactive about what they do. And what they're doing. And how they're doing it. In addition to reacting to things that have happened to them. I mean, we all have incidents that are life altering. But in this case they are also thinking about themselves and their, you know, their future. I think that they understand that they are 50 years old. That, perhaps, at least two thirds of their life may be over. And they're more interested in how well they're going to live the last third of it. And that it's not all down hill from here. And I think that 20 years ago the women in "Waiting to Exhale" weren't just thinking about the end of their lives. Or they weren't thinking of their lives in that way. They were too -- very, very much in the moment.

>> Is there one universal truth that we all can learn about being happy?

>> I think that you have to work for it. Because you deserve it. And then when you get it, you have to own it. But know that it does not last forever. And be prepared for the down -- the highs and the lows. But I think that, when you are feeling it, you know, you need it drag it out as long as you can.

>> How did your characters grow in "Getting to Happy"?

>> Well, I think these women are just more responsible. They feel more responsible for their own sense of joy. And they are willing to make changes to ensure it. They don't feel like victims. They have been victimized in some cases. But they are more interested in taking responsibility for what has happened to them. And I think that's what a lot of us -- I'm hoping that might have been what has resonated with some of the readers. Because there're always things that come out of nowhere to throw us off course. And get us -- derail us. And some people don't seem to know what to do. They just stay there and seem to wait for something else to happen. And these women really are very, very cognizant of the fact that they have some say. And they can accept responsibility for their own happiness. And that's what I'm -- that what I try -- I'm hoping that people can understand.

>> You've been described as one of the world's finest chroniclers of modern life among African-American women and men. What's the source of your insight as a social critic?

>> Well, I don't know about being the world's finest chronicler of modern life among African-American -- Americans. I don't think that's true. You know, I'm just -- I'm just more interested in looking at the lives of people who have been victimized. I don't care on what level. But people that are going through stuff. And they aren't real happy. Things have happened to them. In some cases they are responsible for their own lack of happiness. But I just -- I'm more interested in trying to understand how we get through things. And so I choose characters that sometimes I don't necessarily empathize with or identify with. But I want to feel more compassion and empathy. And so, therefore, I choose -- I give them problems that I don't have. And sometimes that I do have. And then I try to dig in and walk in their footsteps.

>> Can there be a learning experience for you?

>> Oh, lord, yes. I wouldn't waste my time doing this. Otherwise, it's just trying to show off. And, you know, there are other things that I could do for that reason. But, no. I'm more interested in how we as human beings survive and come out ahead. And I don't like the idea of seeing people sad and brokenhearted and such that it becomes a lifestyle. I want -- I want -- I want us to feel more empowered. And that we do have some control over our own well-being. That we have to take ownership of it. And know that there are things out here designed to rob you of it. And that's what I do in my work, try to.

>> "How Stella Got Her Groove Back" and "Waiting to Exhale" both inspired movie box office hits. And "Getting to Happy" has been tapped for a movie

script featuring the original cast. What can you tell us about this exciting prospect?

>> Well, I'm -- it's sitting here in front of me right now, the script. We are on our last draft, hopefully. And, you know, if all goes well, next year, hopefully, it will be on the screen. But that's not -- that's not in my control. But it looks good. It looks promising. I'm not writing it alone. I'm writing it with a writing partner. Her name is Lori Lakin Hutcherson. I couldn't have done this by myself.

>> You were a screenwriter on the movie version of "Waiting to Exhale." How does that process differ from writing a novel?

>> Oh, lord. Two different forms of writing. You know, I think there's a difference, right, doing an adaptation versus just writing an original screenplay. And the difference is that you have to compensate for a lot in a screenplay. Things that are in the book or were in the book that -- you have to put things in that weren't in the book. Get rid of characters. Basically, you think about how you're going to tell the meat of the story. And not the actual -- it's not a reenactment of the story. And so there are a lot of choices that you have to make, that you don't have to make. Because you can linger in a novel. And you don't have that luxury when you're writing a screenplay. It's about 120 pages versus 600 or 500 manuscript pages. I prefer the novel.

>> What makes a good storyteller?

>> Being a good liar. And writing about -- you know, writing in such a way that I think a reader can identify with some of the struggles that your characters are going through. That they care enough about what these people are going through. Because they do, in fact, identify with the emotional aspect of it. It doesn't have to mean -- be the exact experience that your characters are having. But just the emotional impact and how it resonates.

>> Well, my last question is this. The theme of this year's book festival is celebrate the joys of reading aloud. What is your most memorable storytelling or reading aloud experience, either as a child or as an adult?

>> Well, I don't remember being read to as a child. But I know that -- but I did read to my son a lot, who is now 27. And I used to love when we curled up in the bed. And he in his little jammies after his bath. And we had that book in our laps. Especially, "Good Night Moon." Lord, did I know that by heart. "Liza Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp" among others. And I would just read to him. And, I mean, there's something that happens between a child and their mother when -- it's the intimacy, the closeness. You have their undivided attention. And it's a book you're holding in your hand and not a Kindle, back in those days. And he would say "Mommy, read it again." And I would. And I just loved it. But I also, as an adult, I love reading aloud to an audience. Because I get to transport myself and become these characters. And, you know, if it's a man, a male character, I -- my voice changes. And I can read and sound like a old man or whatever. I love that, so.

>> Are you ever planning to have a cameo in any of your upcoming.

>> No.

>> Films?

>> They tried to get me to do a walk on in "Waiting to Exhale." This one scene we -- they were shooting in Phoenix. And it's a scene where this, you know, extra who is a folk guitarist, sitting on -- at the edge of a fountain just playing this one -- these few chords over and over. And all I was supposed to do is walk. Because I said I do not want to say a word. And I must have walked back and forth in that 105 degree weather for about -- about 20 times. And I said, "You know, what? I don't want to be a movie star. This is boring." And I stopped. So they cut me out. And I was -- I wanted to push that woman who was strumming that guitar into the fountain. She must have played those chords, I don't know. No. No. No cameos. No. I like being in the background.

>> Well, your audience, your fans will certainly look forward to your appearance at the National Book Festival on Sunday, September 25th. In the Fiction and Mystery Pavilion at the National Book Festival on the National Mall.

>> I'm so excited because there's so many writers that are going to be there that I just absolutely love and respect. And I don't know if I'm -- how many of them I'm going to get a chance to see. But I'm flattered and honored to be a part of this.

>> Well, we're certainly thrilled that you will be.

>> Thank you.

>> Ms. McMillan, thank you.

>> You're quite welcome. Thank you.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov.

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