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SMC grad student pens book about gang violence, revenge

By John T. Miller



Author Darrion Theodore Carlyle Photo provided

While many young writers finish a new book and languish away trying to find a publisher, Darrion Theodore Carlyle, a Saint Mary's College graduate student, jumped that hurdle by forming his own company.

His first piece of fiction, "Down By the Creek," published by Carlyle Enterprises, is an account of a young black male growing up amid gangs, insecurities, peer pressure and family responsibilities.

A synopsis of the book can be found on his website: "After an act of gun violence, Don Weiland's older sister dies. As Weiland tries to cope with this loss in a promising new environment, his old friends pressure him into joining a gang in order to get revenge on those who killed his sister." Carlyle lost a close relative when he was 16, so he understands the grief of a tragic death.

The author uses two different fonts in telling his story: one is the first-person voice of the younger Dontae, while the other is the high school version of the same person, although he now goes by Don. It would require a "spoiler alert" to tell you why. Carlyle also breaks convention by telling the elder's version in third person, but occasionally switches to first person "in order to get the reader in the character's shoes," he explains.

The writing is a little rough at times, with much of the dialogue in street slang, but some of the ensemble scenes with his "homies" ring true to life and sparkle

with action and dialogue.

The high school Don attends corresponds to the medicine-based magnet school Carlyle attended in Compton. The fictionalized Stevenson High is a magnet school for art.

"There was a lot of gang stuff around my school; Compton was known for it," says Carlyle, who renames the town Avalon for his story. "The school did a good job of keeping everything in focus. I didn't appreciate it when I was young but they did a lot for me and prepared me for college."

The book was cathartic for Carlyle, as he wrestled with issues of depression, grief and suicidal thoughts throughout his young adulthood. "Looking at my thoughts on the page through the characters I created allowed me to really see how I was feeling. Writing the book felt like it gave my life purpose."

Carlyle was born in Carson - a suburb of Los Angeles - to Jamaican immigrant parents who provided a nurturing upbringing. His mother was an English teacher and his father, an officer with the LAPD, taught him a healthy work ethic, especially through his hobby of gardening.

"There's a lot of tree references in the book," says Carlyle. "Planting a seed and watching it grow taught me how to nurture something. That process is a lot like writing my book."

Carlyle majored in English with a minor in Philosophy at UC Riverside. He wrote the book while substitute teaching in Los Angeles. Currently, he is working on his master's in creative writing at SMC, and substitutes in the Acalanes Union High School District. He is currently working on a collection of short stories and a short film, both of which should be complete in the summer of 2019.

Carlyle participated in last year's Spring Author Fest at Campolindo High School to talk about his writing, education and inspiration. According to the school's librarian Sarah Morgan, "The students were especially interested in him as he is young and relatable. They learned that if you find your passion, you can pursue it with specialized schooling and lots of practice."

"It was my mother's idea to start a publishing company for my book and others, so we looked it up and figured out how to do it," says Carlyle. "So far we've published four other author's work. It's exciting

because you can also help many other people." The family-run business is called Carlyle Enterprises.

In order to publish, he talks to the author and they edit together. "It's helpful because the author is able to see how their book is working." The company does cover art, font style, artistic details, and registers it with the Library of Congress.

One of his favorite expressions, which serves as a banner on the website is: "Art is healing, art is expression, and art is communication." Deeply spiritual, Carlyle's personal advice is to "put faith in God and follow your dreams."

So far, Carlyle has donated many books to high schools, libraries and book clubs along with sales.

Info: For more information on purchasing, or to find out about the publishing side, go to <http://carlyleenterprises.com/down-by-the-creek/>.

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