



LISA SAKULSKY

Lawrence Hill

Author Biography

NOT LONG BEFORE they brought my brother, sister and me into the world, my parents had moved to Canada from Washington, D.C. Dad was black and Mom was white, and 1953 was no time to be marrying or living in the American South as an interracial couple. Toronto was better, but far from perfect. While Dad was still a graduate student at the University of Toronto, he and my mother were unable to rent an apartment together. Nobody wanted an interracial couple as tenants. To secure a place for the two of them, Mom had to take on a surrogate white husband for a day—Don McFadyen, a close friend of theirs who played bass in a jazz band. After the lease was signed, Don moved out and my father moved in, and my parents waited nervously to see how much of a stink the landlord would raise. Luckily, the landlord chose not to make an issue of it, and they were allowed to stay.

I was born in 1957 in Newmarket, Ontario, and grew up in a Toronto suburb. Throughout my childhood, stories of my parents' marriage and of their subsequent work as pioneers in Canada's human rights movement punctuated our kitchen table conversations. I was entranced by their ability to navigate injustice with humour and to become engaged Canadians without succumbing to bitterness. Later, I used the stories of my ancestors as emotional fuel to write *Any Known Blood* (1997), a fictional family saga about five generations of men moving back and forth between Canada and the United States.

From my earliest childhood, I recall my mother reading avidly to my siblings and me. I can still hear the inflection of her voice as we listened to “Disobedience,” by A. A. Milne.

“James James
Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great
Care of his mother
Though he was only three . . .”

I live for the sound of music in language and have come to believe that good fiction enters the reader’s ear first. Initially, I read and wrote to make sense of the world and my place in it. Turning to adult literature at the age of fourteen, I ate up the dozens of novels and essays on my parents’ shelves. Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and their contemporaries became my first literary mentors.

I worked for a spell as a newspaper reporter, initially for *The Globe and Mail* in Toronto and later for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. But I didn’t want to spend my life writing newspaper copy. I longed to write fiction and ached every time I came in contact with great art because it reminded me of what I wasn’t doing. Finally, at the age of twenty-seven, I felt despair at the thought of growing old and not accomplishing something more. I decided to take the plunge. I quit my job, moved to Spain, and, since I had no mortgage, car or kids, managed for a year or so to live cheaply. For the first time in my life, I wrote for hours every day, and after returning to Canada I continued to

“ I live for the sound of music in language.”

“ The novel is one of the few art forms to which a person can give birth almost entirely unassisted. ”

Author Biography *(continued)*

work on fiction. Eventually, I finished my first novel, *Some Great Thing*. I could wallpaper my bathroom with all the rejection slips the novel generated, but finally, in 1992, Turnstone Press in Winnipeg published the story—a romp about a black newspaper reporter’s first year on the job.

I have many interests in life—learning languages, reading, travelling, running, and loving my wife and five children are chief among them—but writing is the only kind of work for which I have a real thirst, and novels are what I most like to write. The novel is one of the few art forms to which a person can give birth almost entirely unassisted. The individuality of novel writing entrances me, and it never ceases to amaze me that the quirky turns of a solitary mind can create stories that hum for years, outlasting even the rise and fall of nations.

I have written seven books, *The Book of Negroes*, my third novel, being my most recent. I hope that there will be many more and that they will move readers as deeply as literature has moved me since it lifted me off my feet at the age of fourteen.

—*The Book of Negroes* was published in the United States, Australia and New Zealand under the title *Someone Knows My Name* (2007). Visit www.lawrencehill.com.

