

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Terry McMillan

PERSON

McMillan, Terry

Alternative Names: Terry McMillan;

Life Dates: October 18, 1951-

Place of Birth: Port Huron, Michigan, USA

Work: Bedford Hills, NY

Occupations: Fiction Writer

Biographical Note

Popular writer Terry McMillan was born on October 18, 1951, to Madeline Washington Tillman and Edward McMillan. She grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, a city about sixty miles northeast of Detroit. Her parents divorced when McMillan was thirteen and her father died three years later. McMillan's mother supported her family by working nights at a factory.

As a child, McMillan had little interest in literature, but she discovered the joy of reading as a teenager, while working at a library shelving books. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, graduating with a B.A. in journalism. At this time, she also immersed herself in African American literature classics. While attending Berkeley, she wrote and published her first short story, "The End." After graduating, she moved to New York to study film at Columbia University.

McMillan's first book, *Mama*, was published in 1987 after she took control of the book's publicity when the publisher failed to do so. McMillan wrote 3,000 letters to bookstores, Black organizations and universities, asking them to promote her book. This unique marketing approach proved highly successful; McMillan received several offers for book readings and six weeks after *Mama* was published it went into its third printing.

McMillan continues to find much success as a novelist. *Disappearing Acts*, her second novel, was published in 1989. Her third novel, *Waiting to Exhale*, spent months on the New York Times bestseller list and sold nearly four million copies. McMillan's work tapped into a market long ignored by the publishing industry: young, educated Black women. *Waiting to Exhale* was adapted into a successful film starring Whitney Houston, Angela Basset, Loretta Devine and Lela Rochon. McMillan followed this

accomplishment with the novel *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, an instant best-seller, which was made into a hit film starring Angela Bassett, Whoopi Goldberg and Taye Diggs.

Not limiting herself to writing, McMillan served as the editor of *Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction*. McMillan lives in northern California with her husband, Jonathan Plummer, and son, Solomon. Her most recent novel is entitled *A Day Late and a Dollar Short*.

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