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Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Q&A interview with Karen Siplin

by Shamontiel L. Vaughn



Avid readers of fiction author Karen Siplin know her signature style and proclivity for featuring multicultural characters in her books. The author of four books, Siplin talked to the *Defender* about her work.

CD: Your first book, *His Insignificant Other*, was a *Borders Original Voice* selection and named one of *Cosmopolitan* magazine's *Sexy Summer Reads*. *Cosmo* isn't known for showcasing African American women or African American authors. Were you surprised to win this honor?

KS: I honestly had no idea what to expect when *His Insignificant Other* was published. It was my first novel, and it was mainstream, contemporary women's fiction about a neurotic New Yorker in her 20s who was unhappy with her career and love life. I thought it was a

natural fit for magazines like *Cosmopolitan*. I had watched fellow white authors writing about similar subjects receive tons of coverage for their novels, so I was more surprised that *Cosmopolitan* was the only mainstream magazine to recognize *His Insignificant Other*, especially since it was a *Borders Original Voices* pick. Still, I was excited when I learned *Cosmopolitan* chose it as a sexy summer read. I'm always delighted and grateful when a magazine or newspaper devotes time to me and one of my books.

CD: It is rare to find an African American fiction author who focuses on interracial relationships. Was one of the reasons that you chose this topic because you are married to a white man?

KS: I've been with my husband for 15 years, and we both believe there are a lot of misconceptions about interracial couples. It sometimes seems as if the people who are the most vocal about the negative aspects of interracial relationships have never been in one. In my third novel, *Whiskey Road*, Jimi and Caleb face challenges when they realize they're drawn to one another, but their challenges come from the people around them. I wanted to explore the connection between two people that the outside world views as opposites, even though they have a lot in common. Though Jimi is a Black city girl and Caleb is a white small town boy, they both share a love for motorcycles, and they both feel like outsiders in their own land.

CD: What is the response that you usually get from readers who may still find interracial relationships taboo?

KS: I've had very positive feedback from readers of *Whiskey Road*. Race didn't play a prominent role in my first two novels, but they both featured multicultural characters. Some readers expressed skepticism that such a diverse group of people could be close friends. My goal as a writer is to introduce readers to people they've never met, and I hope they come away knowing the world is a big place, and we're all very different. I want to create Black women who are individuals doing what they do because they want to.

CD: In your second book, *Such a Girl*, you write about a telephone operator at a hotel. Coincidentally you worked as a telephone operator at the Four Seasons Hotel in New York City and as a celebrity personal assistant. Was there any celebrity who gave you inspiration to write your second book?

KS: No. *Such a Girl* is primarily a story about a slacker who meets her ex-boyfriend years after she dumped him and learns just how successful he is. Because I had firsthand experience as a telephone operator in a swanky New York hotel, I knew it would be the perfect setting for someone who was questioning all of the bad choices she made in her life. There's nothing like having absolute wealth rubbed in your face when you feel like a loser.

CD: If your books were ever turned into a movie, who do you think would be the ideal female and male characters to play the lead characters?

KS: I love playing casting director for my novels, but I tend to have difficulty casting the male leads. For Casey, the heroine in *His Insignificant Other*, I'd cast Stacey Dash, Thandie Newton or Kerry Washington. For Kendall, the heroine in *Such a Girl*, I'd cast Sanaa Lathan, Aisha Tyler or Nia Long. And for Jimi, the heroine in *Whiskey Road*, I'd cast Nia Long, Tangi Miller or Naomie

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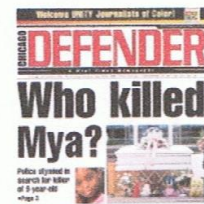
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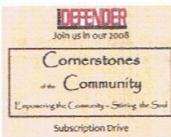
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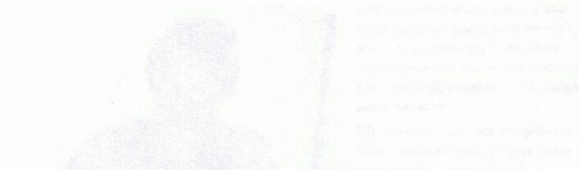
For John Paul, the male lead in His Insignificant Other, I'd cast Morris Chestnut. I'd cast Josh Hartnett as Josh. For Jack, the male lead in Such a Girl, I'd cast the tennis player James Blake or the former soap opera actor Terrell Tilford. I've had a hard time imagining an actor for Caleb, and it's really interesting when readers give me their ideas for actors they'd like to see play Caleb. Josh Lucas and Ashton Kutcher have been recommended, but I lean toward an actor named Jason Wiles, who had excellent chemistry with Nia Long when they played NYPD partners on a TV show called "Third Watch."

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Photo provided by Karen Siplin

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Glen

I think it is great that a writer can find a niche that includes interracial elements. The United States is moving toward a more diverse and race-neutral society. I have not read any of Ms. Siplin's books. But, I am glad to see that a fellow African-American author is having such success. I have written a book titled "The Street Gypsies" that has an interracial romance that runs central to the story. It is about a

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