

# Book written with hopes of bridging black-white gap

By PATRICIA HINSBERG

With her characteristic calmness and compassion, Burniece Avery, a former Detroit elementary teacher and an actress highly acclaimed at Meadow Brook Theatre, has just written a book she hopes will help bridge the gap between the white and black experiences.

What's she's trying to show in her book, she says, is that "there are good and bad in all groups and that human beings have the capacity to be brothers."

The book "Walk Quietly Through the Night and Cry Softly," is an autobiographical novel. Published by Detroit's Balamp Publishing, it will be released to stores throughout the metropolitan area April 4.

Without hate or bitterness, "Walk Softly" chronicles the odyssey of a typical black family trying to survive and stay together in 20th century America.

The book opens "a few days before Christmas 1911" in Alabama. Sally (the author as a child), her mother, Lizzie, well-known in Detroit as the late civil rights activist, the Rev. Elizabeth Cressley are waiting for Mr. Cressley, a sharecropper, to return from settling this year's accounts with the landlord.

When he returns, they find they've been shortchanged again.

Instead of enduring another year of the landlord's exploitation, the family

pulls up stakes and moves in search of better work and housing elsewhere.

The search leads across Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia and finally to Detroit, where some of the bitterest experiences confront them "at the hands of people with the same color of skin."

The book ends with the 1967 Detroit riots. Mrs. Avery taught for years in the Detroit Public School system, from which she retired in 1973. In Meadow Brook's "Member of the Wedding," critics raved about her wide emotional resources and range. Said one, "She is able to bring tears to the eyes."

Aside from Meadow Brook, she was also active in Wayne State University's theater, and others. Why would anyone with so many accomplishments already want to venture out into the risky world of book-writing?

"The book had been gnawing at me for years and years. Then one day, my granddaughter reminded me that I always said I would write a book about my early experiences," says Mrs. Avery in her warm voice.

Even after she'd decided on a book, the thought of the undertaking loomed large. She tried to get some friends to write it, to no avail.

"One of them finally told me. It's the kind of book you're going to have to write yourself."

Still, the writing went laboriously

until inspiration came. "One night I went to see the movie 'Sounder' (a gentle film about a black family's struggles). When I got home, I couldn't wait to get out my pen and pencil. The whole setting of the movie had been so familiar to me."

"Sounder's" low-key influence is apparent in Mrs. Avery's book. In the book, only once is skin color mentioned, and that "because it was completely necessary to understand what was going on."

"I didn't realize that I'd used no references to color until I'd finished the book," says the author. "But I guess that's because it was just the kind of book I wanted to write. It's not the color of your skin that matters, but the kind of person you are."

A positive black point of view, is what she's trying to portray. "Most of the black writing I've seen up till now tells of broken homes and, well, the scary side of life."

"I wanted to show that, there we were, without two pennies to rub together, yet we stayed together. And we didn't go off into anything like dope, either."

Since the book took her three years

to write, she says, "Roots" never was a model for its making. Since, however, Alex Haley's book has affected her profoundly, often in the similarity of the two authors' experiences.

Her voice drops to a hush as she explains, "I was watching 'Roots' one evening on TV and saw almost the same scene as one I had described in my book. I started crying."

"I called my publisher and he told me he knew all the time that there was a great similarity between material found in the two books."

"Roots," like "Walk Softly," is a dignified book about survival, almost what one could call a "consciousness-raising" book. It's the almost simultaneous publication of two books so much alike merely a coincidence or significant of some renewal in collective black self-esteem?

"Well, it could be, but it could also mean that Alex and me are older," says Mrs. Avery (she's 68). "Before, black authors that got the ear of the public were very angry."

"But me and Alex, we've been angry—we're angry now—but our lives' experiences have given us a broader vision."

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## Ed Tawyeas wed 65 years

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Tawyeas, residents on Imperial Highway in Redford, marked their 65th wedding anniversary, with family and friends at a party hosted by their daughter and son in law, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Marion of Northville.

The couple were wed Jan. 11, 1912, in Hibbing, Minn., when she was 15 and he was 22.

Mrs. Tawyeas was 80, was born in Bessmer, Mich., and moved to Hibbing as a small child. Her husband was born in Middletown, Conn., and his family moved to Hibbing where the couple met.

They have seven surviving children, 42 grandchildren and 46 great grandchildren.

Mrs. Tawyeas is an oil painter and a ceramist and is an active member of the Women's Club and the Altar Society of St. Agatha Church in Redford.

Tawyeas worked on the Ambassador Bridge on his arrival in Detroit, in 1927. He retired from the metal plating industry in 1959 but has since gone back into the business in association with two of his sons.

In addition to the party host, the couple's children are: Gweneth Erickson, of Hibbing; Kenneth Tawyeas, of Farmington Hills; Joyce Derby of Mt. Clemens; Lucille Kern, of Farmington Hills; Edna Dexter of Birmingham; and Margaret Hildebrand.

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