

**AMAG: Why do you write?**

Preston Allen: I write for three reasons. First, I write because I am curious about the world. Writing (fiction especially) helps me to understand why people do what they do. My method, if I have one, is to become the characters in my stories in much the same way that "method" actors live and think for weeks, even months, as the characters they will perform on stage and on film. I am constantly asking myself, "Now if I were so-and-so, how would I react to such-and-such? What is my motivation for going here, or saying this, or doing that? Who am I? What is at the core of my being?" Second, I write because I discovered early on that I was sort of good at it. I kept on doing it and got better at it. Now, it feels as natural for me to write as to think. In fact, writing, for me, is thinking. Finally, I write because I am addicted to it. I write because I have to.

**AMAG: Are there any personal stories intertwined with the stories in your book?**

Preston: I tell my writing students that I am the most honest liar they will ever meet. I get to truth through fiction; I get to truth through lies. But now you are reversing it. What you are asking me is whether I get to lies through truth. As a writer, I can't help but see the world with my eyes. The things that influenced me most growing up were (not necessarily in this order) my difficult relationship with my father, music, sex, and being over-protected, or shielded, by the church to such a degree that I was odd, an outsider, anywhere else, but especially among my friends at school. These themes, and the real stories that engendered them, find their way naturally into my work. It's called *Churchboys and Other Sinners* because in it, because you will find church boys and sinners: illicit lovers, crazy fathers, crank callers, and devious car salesmen, all of them bursting at the seams with private hopes and dreams they pray will not be dashed by the whims of fate or a God they're not sure they believe in anymore.

**AMAG: What is the ultimate joy (act) of writing?**

Preston: I cherish seeing the thing on black and white. Some writers I know don't read their stuff after they have written it. The fun part for me is to buy a copy of my book and read it like I would read anything else; or better yet, to discover things that I wrote years ago and forgot about, even things that were not good enough to be submitted for publication, and read them again with new eyes. Wow, I say to myself, look at the truth in that. Wow, I say to myself, this kid sat down and wrote that, can you believe it? Man oh man, I say, isn't that something?

**AMAG: Short Stories vs. novels, is there a preference?**

Preston: I am a short story writer. I think like a short story writer; my beginning,

middle, and end are dense and packed with irony and wit; the sound of a word and the feel of a sentence are almost as important to me as character and plot. I read short stories. Two of my biggest writing idols were short story writers; Cheever and Roth (back in the day). Now don't get me wrong: as a voracious reader, I love novels and I have written some good ones. My thriller Hoochie Mama (featuring the toughest, most morally complex black woman cop in the south, M Gantry) was a finalist for the Gold Pen Award and was a bestseller on Mosaicbooks.com. Bounce, a sexy African American romance novel, is every bit as good, and I sell out of it every time I do a reading. But even these novels began as short stories.

**AMAG: Which story is your favorite-if you could pick one-and why?**

The clever (and honest) answer to that one is, my favorite story is the one I just finished writing last night. Ha-ha-ha. Actually, looking back at the collection, Churchboys and Other Sinners, I find it hard to say. I can point out several stories that for different reasons vie for the superlative best/favorite/most-loved. "The Lord of Travel" is such a cool piece. I love the feel of it, the textures. I love the way Elwyn has evolved into this corrupt car salesman, who is still really a little churchboy deep down inside. "Is Randy Roberts There?" is also very strong. I said some things in that story that were heartfelt about someone I really cared about (talk about autobiographical writing!), and when this friend read the story and recognized it was based on her life, she made some changes – not big changes, unfortunately, but change nonetheless. Then there is "Get Some." I get weepy reading that one. Fathers, sons, love, and butt whoopings. "Prince William Blows Good," like Randy Roberts," is a favorite among my readers. I love it because the writing is tight and the story takes a risk – incest – and still gets the job done.

**AMAG: Sunday afternoon. What are you doing-any season?**

Preston: Sunday afternoon, like every other afternoon when I am not at work, or at the park with the kids, or chilling with the wife, I am writing. Right now I am shopping a novel (Memory Dreams), which is sort of a modern day African American fairy tale; and a short story collection (Nadine's Husband), which began as four sequential short stories in Carol Taylor's best selling erotic anthology Brown Sugar (1, 2, 3, and 4). In terms of new work, I am working on completing The Faithful, which is the novel version of the Elwyn and Sister Morrisohn stories in Churchboys and Other Sinners. People really responded to those stories, so I think it's time I filled in the blanks. As a writer, I keep very busy. But I am a writer, and that's what writers do. We don't talk about writing. We write.