

Interview with Author Sadeqa Johnson By: Michelle Cuttino

Sadeqa Johnson, a former public relations manager, spent several years working with well-known authors such as JK Rowling, Bebe Moore Campbell, Amy Tan and Bishop TD Jakes. She is the co-founder of 12th Street Press, a boutique publishing company specializing in unique voices. An inner peace advocate, Sadeqa Johnson is a meditation teacher, public speaker and motivational blogger.

Originally from Philadelphia, she currently resides in the northern New Jersey with her husband and three children. Her sophomore novel, *Second House From the Corner* is scheduled to be released in 2013.

Michelle: Namaste Sadeqa and thank you for sharing yourself with us. Meditation is a big part of your life. When did you first become involved with it and what do you feel are its benefits?

Sadeqa: I began meditating about six years ago after my second child was born. Bleary eyed and overwhelmed with the responsibility of caring for two young children while trying to write was crippling for me. Finding meditation was like watering a parched, potted plant. Instantly I felt my life change. The more I sat in meditation and quieted my mind, the clearer I became on my purpose in life. My heart's mission is to inspire. I write a weekly motivational blog, give talks and workshops on meditation and have been leading a group meditation class for over three years. Meditation has made me more intuitive, helped me with balancing my life as a mother, wife, teacher, writer, and provided a deeper focus when I'm writing. Meditation clears my head so that I am open and attuned with the world. Before practicing meditation I use to force the characters into position, now I do my best to listen and be the conduit.

Michelle: You were inspired by many musical influences while writing *Love in a Carry-On Bag*, including Amy Winehouse, Esperanza Spalding, Nina Simone and Terrance Blanchard, to name a few. Why did you choose the music of these particular artists to write to?

Sadeqa: It wasn't really a choice it was more of a calling. These artists have created albums that resonated with me and spoke to the journey my characters were on as I was writing. The lyrics and arrangement of the music often helped me to express the joys and pains, highs and lows in *Love in a Carry-On Bag*.

Michelle: You worked in publishing many years prior to the release of your debut novel. What were your responsibilities during that time?

Sadeqa: I was Publicity Manager and handled the campaigns of authors such as JK Rowling, Bishop TD Jakes, Rebecca Walker, Amy Tan, Bebe Moore Campbell to name a few.

Michelle: Coming from a publishing background, why did you choose to self-publish as opposed to signing with an established house? Did you run into the same roadblocks as many other new and upcoming African-American authors?

Sadeqa: Absolutely. I started 12th Street Press with my husband out of sheer necessity. I had a very prominent agent in New York City who was unable to secure a deal for me. Having a background in publishing and still being unable to be published by a major house was devastating. My husband and father are both entrepreneurs and neither could figure out why I didn't want to go out on my own. So one day my husband asked me, "what is it that you want from a publishing house?" I told him that I wanted an editor to bring my novel up to professional standard. He looked at me and said, "So let's hire an editor."

I then had to get out of my own way. I had a limited belief of myself, thinking I was just a writer. But once I recognized that the plan for me was much bigger than what I believed, it became clear that I was destined to be a publisher AND a writer. Once that clicked in my own head and I said yes, 12th Street press started tumbling, twirling and picking up speed.

Michelle: Black Love is a beautiful thing, but we don't always have an opportunity to see it positively exhibited in print or on screen. Did you write this story with the goal of showcasing a powerful Black love story?

Sadeqa: Showcasing strong black love was my goal. I was inspired by movies such as Love Jones, Love and Basketball and Mo Better Blues and while I was writing, I kept telling myself that Love in a Carry-On Bag would be the next big love story told on screen. My hope in telling this story was to showcase that heart wrenching all encompassing love that we all know exist but we don't get to see on the big screen.

Michelle: In your opinion, what makes for a great love story? Is it plot, character development, sex, all of the above or something entirely different?

Sadeqa: For a good love story to work the characters have to be memorable. As a reader I need to be connected and invested with the characters from page one so that I'm willing to go on the journey with them. I also like to feel that push and pull, that miscommunication that we all feel in love, like I know I said I didn't want a Valentine's gift but what I was really saying is that I wanted you to surprise me. How come you can't read my mind!

There of course need to be secrets, and past experiences that jump out of the closet to shake things up, because those lovers need to end up in a deeper place than they did when they began the journey. Steamy sex scenes are a must. I prefer the type of loving that leaves a bit to the imagination, because I can dream up much more hotness when it's implied, umm trust me.

Michelle: Why did you choose to fuse Jazz into the storyline as opposed to Rap or Rhythm & Blues?

Sadeqa: My father exposed me to jazz music very early in life. I dated a trumpet player while in college and like Erica, I would spend all night at jazz clubs while he lost himself in the music. I'm very attracted to musicians because of their passion for creating beauty. I think they are brilliant, and it was a joy to give Warren the burden of carrying around a gift for music, when all his family wanted him to do was have a good corporate job. Warren's love and passion for his art was satisfying for me to create, because it expressed my own passion for writing.

Michelle: *Love in a Carry-On Bag* also deals with long-distance relationships. Speaking from experience, what is the secret to success when involved in one?

Sadeqa: It might sound cliché but to communicate with your mate. I've learned that you have to be willing to stand in front of your partner completely naked and vulnerable from the inside out and say, this is who I am. Every day I plan to get better, and I need and want you by my side along this long and beautiful life walk. Trusting that person fully is also very important

Michelle: Will your follow-up novel be a love story as well, or do you plan to stray from the cliché and write a different story?

Sadeqa: I don't have plans to write a sequel. Erica and Warren have been in my head for over ten years and honestly I'm ready to move on. In my next novel, I really want to focus on shame and secrecy. I've had this idea of writing the story of a stay-at-home mom drowning in domestic bliss having lost all sense of self. After three children, one with a genetic condition, she realizes this is not the life she has signed up for but feels stuck. She's lugging around a secret past that her husband doesn't know about, but it only takes one telephone call for her carefully sculpted world to crash.

Michelle: As an advocate for inner peace, how can one find a balance within themselves that will transcend into their relationship? Is there a connection?

Sadeqa: I like to say a better you, is a better you for all of the people you take care of. In my marriage, meditation has helped us tremendously. I've been practicing meditation for over six years and my husband has probably meditated two times in his life but he

has benefited from my practice. What happens when you meditate is that you become different, the things that use to set you off don't anymore. You become the eye of the hurricane with everything buzzing around you but never landing. Because you are different you make those around you different. My husband was never the type to stop in his tracks and realize that he was wrong, but now he will. My energy has caused him to make the adjustment and it has made for a happier closer marriage. He's open in a way that he wasn't when I wasn't bringing the meditative energy into our home. The women make the household go round, if I'm centered, balance and happy, then everyone who comes in my path will be a reflection of this energy.

Michelle: When a reader puts down *Love in a Carry-On Bag*, what do you hope they walk away with?

Sadeqa: A sense that reading my book was worth their time and that they are better off because I've touched and deepened their life with my gift.

Michelle: What do you want your readers, followers and fans to know about the kind of person Sadeqa Johnson is? What is your personal message and/or testament?

Sadeqa: I wake up every morning with gratitude in my heart. My goal is to inspire and enrich the lives of others. When my dreams seem beyond my scoop of vision I ask myself, why not me? And push on. My husband calls me the most dedicated woman he knows because I never quit. Never.

Michelle: Lastly, what is your advice to the author who has also had a book in them for many years and still hasn't made a move to bring it to fruition?

Sadeqa: Don't quit. Writing takes time and dedication and it is very important to be true to the craft. Take writing classes, form a writing group and read as much as you can. Give yourself time and permission to grow, and be patient with yourself. Believe in your creativity above all. Allow the magic to flow.

For more information:

www.sadeqajohnson.com

Email: **info@sadeqajohnson.com**

Twitter: **[@sadeqasays](https://twitter.com/sadeqasays)**

Facebook: **[SadeqaJohnson](https://www.facebook.com/SadeqaJohnson)**