



## **Curtis Bunn , Norfolk State University- c/o 1983, Journalism & Mass Communication with a concentration in Print Journalism**



**Name :** Curtis Bunn

**Your HBCU :** Norfolk State University

**Graduation Year :** 1983

**Major :** Journalism & Mass Communication with a concentration in Print Journalism

### **1. Where are you from? Who introduced you to HBCUs?\***

I grew up in Washington D.C., and really did not like the snow and cold weather of the winters. So, my objective was to go to college in either Hawaii, California, Florida or Texas, just to avoid cold weather. But I realized it would be difficult to see my family as often as I would have liked; So when a counselor at Ballou High School, mentioned Norfolk State to me, it aroused my interest. I am the first in my family to attend college, and so there was no one to guide me and I was completely unaware of HBCUs. I took a visit to Norfolk State, which was only about three hours from D.C., and I fell in love with the place, the sense of family and heritage. Best decision I could have made.



Read "Baggage Check" the first chance you get! | Image Credit: goodreads.com

### **2. Why did you choose an HBCU over a pwi?\***

I was totally unfamiliar with HBCUs until a counselor suggested Norfolk State. He had heard it had a strong journalism program, and he knew I wanted to be a journalist. What sold me on it was the feeling of family I got when I visited. There was a lot of pride in seeing thousands of young people who look like you aspiring to something greater. And there was a sense from the faculty and staff that they wanted to see you succeed. My experience at Norfolk State was so profound and fun and life-changing that I wrote a book, "Homecoming Weekend," (check out his interview with Rolling Out) as an homage or love letter to HBCUs in general and Norfolk State in particular.

### **3. What is the story of your "experience" at Your HBCU given its heralded status as a stellar and prestigious institution?\***

I overcame nervousness with the help of my first roommates, Bruce Lee, Curtis West, Tony Coleman and Tony Brown. They didn't know they were doing that, but we became fast friends; Had a great time playing Spades, Backgammon, joking with each other, playing basketball. . . you name it. Having good people in my room helped me ease into college life and away from any nervousness I might have had. . . I knew I wanted to be a journalist when I was 13, and one of the reasons I chose Norfolk State was because of its journalism program. Best decision I could have made for my career. Norfolk State set everything in motion for me. . . I was a reporter, Sports Editor, Associate Editor and Executive Editor of the Spartan Echo, our campus newspaper over my

four years at Norfolk State. I was MVP and leading scorer of the Intramural Basketball League. I pledged Alpha Phi Alpha at Norfolk State, Epsilon Pi chapter of the first and greatest fraternity for black men.

#### **4. "First time" experiences at your HBCU?\***

The biggest was living away from home. I never went to an overnight camp growing up. We couldn't afford it. I remember when my father, mother, sister and one of my brothers, Eddie, dropped me off at NSU. I got settled into the room and my little brother sat on the bed and cried. He was seven. He didn't want to leave me. That's when it hit me that I would be on my own. And I knew then how I handled that "first" would determine my life. If I went buck wild and just partied and hung out, I would have a sketchy future. But if I partied, had fun, embraced growing up and did what I needed to do in the classroom, I could have an amazing experience. I had an amazing experience!!! I had as much fun as anyone, but (most of the time) was disciplined enough to get my work done and grow as a potential young journalist, too.

#### **5. Who are the professors that have impacted your life in and out of the classroom? How did they do that?\***

Dr. Lawrence J. Kagwaa, who was the head of the Journalism Department when I was a freshman, was very influential. He identified my potential and made sure I had no financial issues by granting me scholarships for my remaining three years that took care of all of my tuition. That was huge. My mom and dad had scraped together every penny they could muster to send me to Norfolk State. I could not get any financial aid and we knew nothing of student loans. So, Dr. Kagwaa's leadership in the department and financial help was immeasurable. The students that left the largest impressions were Leon Carter and Derek Dingle. Leon was my editor when I arrived and he was tough and smart and funny and encouraging. He made me a journalist. He's a big-time editor at ESPN New York after being an award-winning Sports Editor of the New York Daily News. Then there is Derek T. Dingle, who came in when I did. Derek's talent and seriousness and commitment to becoming a journalist drove me. We have fun and created great memories. But what I remember the most was us writing great stories and growing as journalists and young men while putting our all into our student newspaper, the award-winning Spartan Echo. [What did they do that continues to mean so much to you to this day?] They showed the way, in different forms. Dr. Kagwaa was a leader who cared about the students. Leon was advanced for his age and understood the value of managing people. Derek was smart and talented, but also serious about what he wanted to achieve. All those elements seeped into me and helped me to round out into the journalist and author that I am.



The One and Only "Homecoming Weekend" by Curtis Bunn | Image Credit: Curtis Bunn

#### **6. What to date has been your proudest moment @ Your HBCU?**

The first moment came when I saw my name above my first article as a freshman. That was a proud moment, a moment that pushed me to do more and more, which led to my second proud

moment. Because of my work on the school paper and my internship at the Virginian-Pilot newspaper, I had three job offers to be a journalist before I graduated: The Winston Salem Journal, The Virginian Pilot and The St. Petersburg Times. I took the job as a news reporter at the Times, and later worked in Washington, D.C, at The Washington Times for 1 1/2 years, 11 years in New York at Newsday and the New York Daily News and 14 years at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. My third proudest moment was graduating. I am the first in my family to do so, and that was special. I'm proud to say that my son, Curtis Jr., is a 2005 graduate of Norfolk State!!!!

### **7. What was your proudest moment in your life to date?**

The birth of my children, Curt and Gwen, 21, tops anything, everything. Professionally, it is hard to say. A lot a great things have happened to me in my career and I thank God for that. I have won national awards as a journalist, covered the Olympics in Seoul, Korea and Australia, covered Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant at the height of their careers, covered Super Bowls and NCAA Final Fours and World Series and Sugar Ray Leonard and Mike Tyson and on and on. I have written books that were bestsellers and loved by thousands of readers. That's pretty heady stuff.

### **8. If you could only speak two sentences to the youth coming after you what would you say?**

Find your passion, that one thing you'd REALLY enjoy doing. Then pursue it with a dogged determination.

### **9. Entrepreneur? Tell us about your business.**

[As an accomplished author, what is your process when writing a new novel?] As a journalist who gets a rush out of writing on deadline, I usually find myself putting off writing the heart of my books until I am under some measure of deadline pressure. That's when my mind is most active and I am most productive. In general, I come up with an idea and flesh it out in my head first, for several days. Then I put the ideas down in my laptop. From there, I begin the story. Usually, the opening line is floating around in my head for several days. I edit as I go. Meaning, if I write three chapters, before I start the next chapter, I go back and read the previous three. Not just to add more heart and soul to what has been written, but also to edit it for typos or any errors. Most importantly, I regain momentum as I go back over what was written. It puts me back in that writing place, and I am able to go on with the next chapters in the rhythm of the previous chapters. When I know I am approaching the end of the book, I get a sense of excitement and sadness, too. Excited because I am really pleased and excited about what I have created, but sad because the characters I created in my book live in me, and so pretty soon I would be abandoning them, and that makes me a little sad. [What is the process to having ones' thoughts turned into published novels like yours?] The process is different for everyone. For me, my latest works have been published under Zane's Strebtor Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster/Atria. It's been a true blessing for me because I have essentially just submitted my proposals to Zane and Strebors' editorial director, Charmaine Roberts, and they have come back to offer me deals. No agent. No drama. So, I'm blessed that Zane read and enjoyed my first novel, *Baggage Check* (2001), which

was No. 1 on the Essence magazine best-sellers list). She went on to do amazing things in publishing, including Strebor. She and Charmaine seek out diverse, interesting talents, and so I had a pipeline directly to the decision-makers, making it much easier for me than it would be otherwise, I believe. [How did the National Book Club Conference come to be? Why did you found the conference?] In 2001, I traveled a lot to meet with book clubs about my first novel, *Baggage Check*." It was such a great experience, each one of them. I'm sure if they hated the book, it would not have been so much fun. But they enjoyed it and we enjoyed each other discussing it. It just hit me one day that most people do not get a chance to sit down and converse with the authors of books they have read. It was then that I said to myself, "Someone needs to create an event where readers and authors come together for two days and have a succession of book club meetings." Then I decided that I would be that person. And so the 2003 NBCC was the first and we have been going strong since. This year will be the 11th-annual NBCC. And not only that, but I have taken a group to Ghana, West Africa (2007) and South Africa (Johannesburg and Cape Town) last year. Both were incredible experiences. We noticed on your Facebook page your recent success with Strebor Books/Simon & Schuster, what are your upcoming novels "The Old Man In The Club" and "Seize The Day" about? The Old Man In The Club is a book that will reveal why this man, Winston Thomas, at 63 has such an interest in pursuing young woman and partying with people less than half his age. We've all seen that guy and wondered, "What is he doing in here?" Well, my position is that it's not just about being a dirty old man pursuing young women. Things happened in his life that brought him to that place, and those things are interesting, sad, funny, and empowering. Seize The Day is about a man who learns he has terminal cancer, and instead of submitting to chemotherapy that MIGHT prolong his life by a few months, but DEFINITELY would make him feel terrible, he instead decides to live out his life and mend relationships, build new ones and take in the waning days of his life. [How can HBCU students and alumni get involved with the National Book Club Conference and possibly assist you in future literary research?] The website is [www.nationalbookclubconference.com](http://www.nationalbookclubconference.com). Students and alums can first support by attending the event. Registration information is on the site. Also, I am reachable through the site for any volunteer interests anyone may have. When will "The Old Man In The Club" and "Seize The Day" be available on the market?Where/How can fans of your work purchase these great novels? The Old Man In The Club will be released in the fall of 2014 and Seize The Day in 2015. My next book, *The Truth Is In The Wine*, will be released on October 8th of this year. It is about a man who tries to save his troubled marriage by taking his wife, mother and mother-in-law on a Thanksgiving trip to Napa Valley. While tasting the wine, though, people begin revealing secrets better left untold, secrets that challenge relationships and test moral values.