

Dan White: I was looking at Angela Davis's autobiography, which you edited. I interviewed her the other day and we were talking about how cinematic it was, in the intro, it takes you right there. It doesn't read like a political tract.

Toni Morrison: No.

Dan White: She attributes much of that cinematic quality to your editorial suggestions, your questions of her, to help her make it a lived experience for the reader.

Toni Morrison: Well, see there? That's the trick; I think it's being a teacher in addition to being an editor. People always think that if you're a writer, how can you be also an editor? Aren't you competing with the people that you're editing? But that doesn't have anything to do with it. It's an entirely different mindset. The ones that I admire, like the early Gayl Jones and Toni Cade, just knocked me out. And working with Angela was so sweet. It was really in a class by itself. I went with her on her book tour.

Dan White: She mentioned that in my interview with her. She said you toured with her before you were Toni Morrison. [Toni Morrison is the nom de plume of Chloe Anthony Wofford.]

Toni Morrison: That's right, all over Scandinavia; it was amazing. I was a very good handler. I didn't know what that meant then, but I know that people came up to her and said, "My brother is in prison, and I'm wondering if we could have a cocktail party?" Like five of these people. The thing was, she would stop and listen, and say, "Where is he?" I'd say, "Angela, come on."

Dan White: You seem to me someone who's good at setting boundaries.

Toni Morrison: Yeah, I learned three things, I tell everybody, that I used to never use these words much. Now I'm happy to use them pretty much all the time. One is *no*, the other one is *shut up*, and the last one is *get out*. [laughs] Now that I have that arsenal I can go forth!

Dan White: So what sustains you now in terms of your work-life? Do you have unmet goals? Anything you haven't tried?

Toni Morrison: No, I've pretty much run the gamut. Writing novels is the world to me, literally. The outside world can be okay, or not okay, beautiful, or not beautiful, but I am in control here when I'm writing. Nobody's telling me what to do. The expectations are high, because they're mine. That is a kind of freedom I don't have anywhere else.

Portions of this interview appeared in the UC Santa Cruz Magazine, which assigned Dan White to interview Morrison in advance of her appearance in Santa Cruz, California, where she delivered the Peggy Downes Baskin Ethics Lecture at the Rio Theater on October 25, 2014, and, that evening, received the UC Santa Cruz Foundation Medal at the Founders Celebration.

Born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, **Toni Morrison** is a Nobel Prize- and Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist, editor and professor. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue and richly detailed African-American characters. Among her best known novels are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Love* and *A Mercy*.

Dan White is the author of *Under The Stars*, an irreverent history of American camping, and *The Cactus Eaters: How I Lost My Mind and Almost Found Myself on the Pacific Crest Trail*, a Northern California Independent Booksellers Association bestseller and *Los Angeles Times* "Discovery" selection. He has taught composition at Columbia University and San Jose State. He is the contributing editor of *Catamaran Literary Reader* and received his MFA from Columbia University. He lives in Santa Cruz, California, with his wife and daughter.

CHRIS WINFIELD

Untitled, 2016
Acrylic on canvas board, 40 x 40 in



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