

Harris

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individuals. Explain how spirituality plays a significant role in your work?

E. Lynn Harris: My faith is the most important thing in my life, and the way that I try to show it is not by preaching, but by example. Before I do anything, I put my faith first. Before I write anything, I always pray. My books will always have that kind of content as a subtle kind of a thing.

SV: How do we get over deep, profound sorrow? How do we move past catastrophes?

E. Lynn Harris: I think it's faith, believing in something. We're never going to be given more than we can bear. The pain makes us stronger.

SV: What impact has AIDS had on the community?

E. Lynn Harris: A tremendous impact, not only on the gay and bisexual community, but on the black community as a whole. A lack of knowledge allows it to spread in our community more rapidly than in others. We don't talk about sex, let alone safe sex. We're not going to talk about diseases that we're afraid of...Fear really can kill us.

SV: How fundamental is faith to the revitalization of the black community?

E. Lynn Harris: Faith is very important, probably the most important thing. I think that if you have faith, you can live your life without fear. It's fear that holds us back from achieving what we can as individuals. If I went into love with fear, I could never

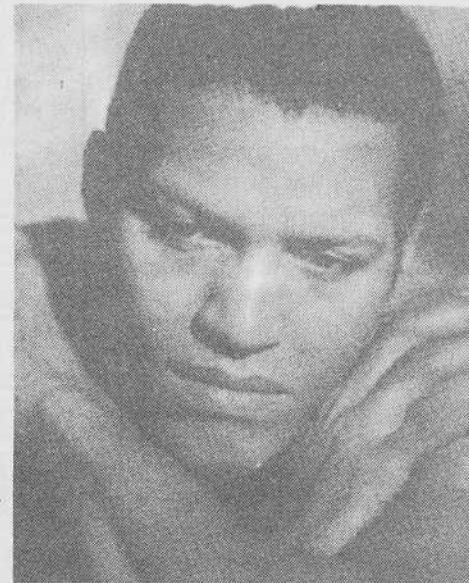
experience love, so faith is the most important thing.

SV: Your books often address one of the most painful problems afflicting the black community - such as the search for intimacy and life partnership.

E. Lynn Harris: I



[bisexuality]; I'm just writing about it. Women who spend their anger [criticizing gay or bisexual black men] are probably



these jetsetters experience pain, disillusionment and dissatisfaction. What makes a life rich and fulfilling?

E. Lynn Harris: Peace of self, which I'm discovering now. I'm probably happier than I've ever been, and it has little to do with the wealth I've attained from the books. It's just the gradual process of growing up, and realizing that I'm OK, as I am.

The accouterments that my characters have are not as important as who they are as people.

SV: You continually make references to the skin color of your characters. Is this purely descriptive, or does it speak to how we, as a black community, make color distinctions of our own?

E. Lynn Harris: It's [primarily] descriptive. I think that's the wonderful thing about black people, that we come in so many different shades. It has never been a class thing with me.

I do know that I've benefited by the color of my skin, but that's other people's ignorance. It's not something I've sought out. It's a part of our culture; it exists in our community. Until we're rid of it, I'll continue to bring it up.

Beheaded

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who was burned and beheaded during the early morning hours of July 25. The FBI and the civil rights division of the Justice Department have opened preliminary investigations into the case and will determine if Johnson's killing was a hate crime.

Grayson County Sheriff Jerry Wilson has said there is no evidence to suggest that the crime was racially motivated. His investigator initially called the FBI because of the way the crime occurred.

Johnson was the only black man at a small gathering with four whites. The five friends were at the home of Louis Ceparano, who lived on a hilltop in Elk Creek, a rural hamlet that sits on the edge of Mount Rogers Recreation Area.

Ceparano has said he recalls little from that night. He said he consumed a concoction of drugs and alcohol and only jolted from his trancelike state when sheriff's deputies arrested him.

Court documents allege that Ceparano and another partner, Emmett "Junior" Cressell Jr., carried Johnson from Ceparano's trailer. Johnson

was doused with gasoline, set on fire, then beheaded.

Cressell and his girlfriend, Christy Harden, walked into the Sheriff's Office shortly afterward to report the killing.

Deputies arrested Ceparano that day. Cressell was arrested three days later. Both are charged with first-degree murder and are being held without bond.

believe that it's the fear of being totally intimate with someone. We accept and expect love from our families. We know that they will hurt us, but we also know that they'll love us.

When we seek out people to love, however, there's always that big fear that he/she will eventually leave.

SV: Due to the actual or perceived lack of eligible black men in the greater community, what do you say to female critics who argue that the "deviant" sexuality of gay or bisexual black men contributes to the weakening of traditional black family structures?

E. Lynn Harris: People really ought to let people be who they are. They shouldn't try to force people into "pegs."

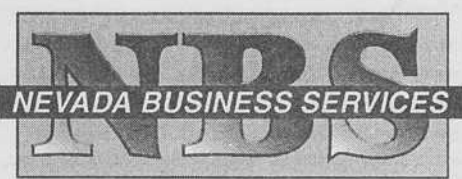
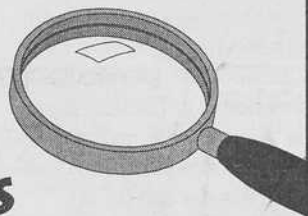
On the other hand, there's a great deal of disrespect for black women both gay and

straight in the black community. It's that whole thing of "I'm a man, so I'm better than you or I have more power than you," rather than treating each other as human beings. I haven't felt any of that animosity directly because of the way I position myself. I won't allow someone to come and tell me what I ought to do. I didn't create this phenomenon

going to miss out on a good straight man, because, guess what...the majority of black men are straight.

SV: Most of your novels revolve around the "black aristocracy," the talented tenth so to speak. Most of these people have attained material wealth and the "good life," yet in some of your latest work

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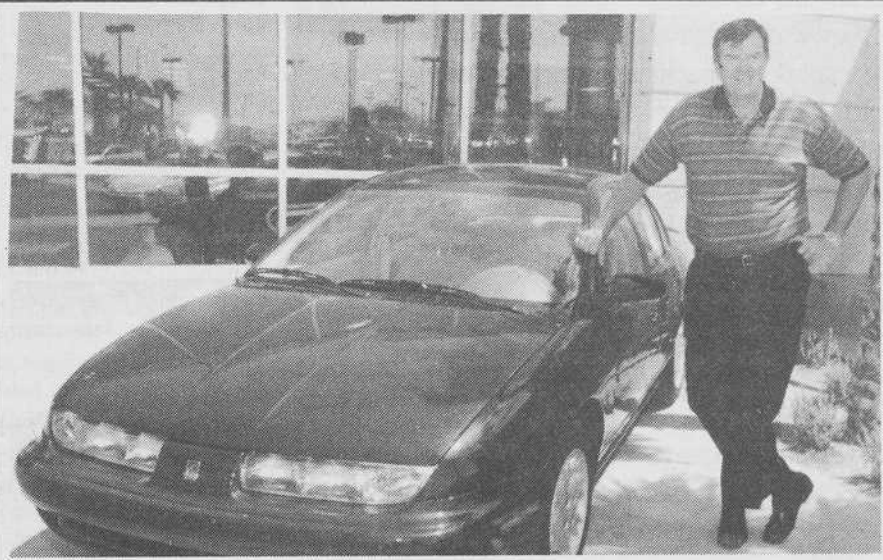
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