

## Got A Problem?

By Gwendolyn Baines

Ask Gwendolyn Baines national author and lecturer and syndicated NNPA advice columnist.

Dear Gwendolyn:

I am 32 years old and finally taking life seriously—unlike when I was 18. I left a good paying janitorial job to hang out on the streets and slept with females for 10 more years. During that time, I was blessed and saved from drug overdoses, suicide attempts, shoot-outs and various street attacks. You name it, I was involved in it.

This is my problem: I was incarcerated for 18 months. After my release, I could not find work and became homeless, sleeping on the streets. After about six months, I got into a transitional program that helped men and women. Through the program, I was able to get a Section 8 voucher. I looked at an apartment that had been approved by Section 8, but when I saw a roach, I turned it down. Besides that, the kitchen cabinets were dirty. Now my voucher expires within six weeks. It allows me to seek housing in another town, but I don't have money to go any other place. Many apartments have a rule about not accepting felons. Do you think I made a bad decision? I'm living on the streets again.

Robert

Dear Robert:

Without even asking that question, you know you made a poor decision. Think about it. What you should have been noticing most was the location itself. It's better to be in a stable area than where trouble lurks. Before your voucher expires, I suggest that you go back to the apartment where you saw the roach and inquire of its vacancy. Express to the landlord and to Section 8 your concerns.

Let me tell you this: I find it difficult to believe that you turned down a place to sleep, a place to eat, a place to relax and place you could have called 'home'—all because of a roach? Roaches can be exterminated. You could have cleaned the cabinets. I simply refuse to believe that you lived on the street and did not encounter danger beyond a roach. That little roach that you saw will cause you less harm than the roaches on the street — that walk upright.

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Dear Gwendolyn:

I am a 38-year-old African-American man. I have been in prison for 5 years with 5 to go. Being in jail is depressing. There's nothing to do. Everything is habit and routine. I am here because of survival reasons. I grew up deprived, neglected and downtrodden all my life. I never had a chance to go to school under the circumstances. My parents were homeless people; therefore, I've been raised in the streets, deprived of everything that's essential to a human being. Since I've been here, mom, dad and loved ones all left and disowned me, and I haven't heard from them. Jail used to be about rehabilitation, but now it's the opposite. They don't even want you to improve yourself anymore. All their educational financial resources are depleted. The literature and books they teach from have no relevance to the technological age.

Charles

Dear Charles:

There is a reason so many correctional facilities no longer put money into the budget for rehabilitation: recidivism. So many prisoners who spent years behind bars, were supposedly rehabilitated, but within months or even days of release, they offended again. Yes, a few hundred released prisoners can ruin it for those who remain.

A deprived life is not the cause of your troubles. Let me tell you this: Some boys who grew up with everything—loving parents, a car at 16, best dressed at the prom, a college education, and still became an inmate in some prison. So you see, being poor did not create the problem. A boy can grow up in the most horrible government housing but still become head of a corporation, a doctor, a lawyer or U.S. president.

You said you did not go to school, but your letter was well written. If you wrote it yourself, you have a gift and should use it to make a better life.

Don't be bitter with your parents. Even though homeless, they didn't throw you into a trash container and walk away. Through all their hardships—they kept you.

Got a problem? Ask Gwendolyn Baines. Write to her at P.O. Box 78246, Nashville, TN 37207-8246, and send a SASE for prompt reply. Email her at gwenbaines@hotmail.com.

# Richie gets laugh off Nicole

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — It's not easy raising a celebante. Take it from Lionel Richie.

The singer was accepting the "Icon" honor at Sunday night's taping of the TV Land Awards, when he got applause and a laugh at daughter Nicole's expense.

"Forget about surviving 40 years in the music business," Lionel Richie told the audience.

"Just surviving 27 years of Nicole Richie has been a struggle-and-a-half, I want to tell you. I stand here as a survivor, I want you to know, for all the parents out there."

In 2007, Nicole Richie spent 82 minutes in jail after being convicted of driving under the influence of drugs.

She was arrested in December 2006 after witnesses reported seeing her Mercedes-Benz sport utility vehicle headed the wrong



Lionel Richie performs at the TV Land Awards on Sunday in Santa Monica, Calif.

way on a freeway in Burbank, Calif.

Nicole, who made a name for herself on Fox's "The Simple Life" along with

Paris Hilton, hasn't posed for any mug shots lately. Rather, she has been spotted out and about with 3-month-old Harlow, her daughter with

Good Charlotte rocker Joel Madden.

The sixth annual TV Land Awards is scheduled to air June 15 on the cable network.

## Book explores family's slave past

**Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History**

By Thomas Norman DeWolf; Beacon Press; Hardcover, \$24.95; 276 pages

ISBN: 978-0-8070-7281-3

By Kam Williams  
Sentinel-Voice

"If you are able to see [your ancestors' role in slavery] differently, you can get a feeling that one's own family, one's own reality, is built on a pile of corpses. It seems almost as though our own comfort is in inverse relationship to the things that produced it..."

The sense of place, entitlements and ease in society that I feel is in direct inverted relationship to the blood and violence that created it. That's an awful contradiction to try to inhabit.

I've never understood the concept of inheriting the 'sins of the fathers' so clearly as I do now. Oppressors are damaged by what they perpetrate against others, but it's not just the oppressors and their victims who suffer. Like a stone dropped into a pond, the consequences of oppression ripple out in all directions, impacting everything and everyone."

— Excerpted from Chapter 18, "Sankofa" (page 231)

Most Americans think of slavery as an institution which primarily benefited Southern plantation owners. However, truth be told, the

North profited just as much from the evil enterprise.

For not only was slavery legal there for over 200 years, but the bulk of the trafficking in human chattel was also run from the region.

Today, most of the descendants of such slave traders maintain a "willful silence" about their ancestors' legacy, and are raised safely separated from African-Americans.

Nonetheless, they live in fear of "losing our privilege, money, and respect" according to Thomas Norman DeWolf, "even when those things are unearned or phony." DeWolf, the author of "Inheriting the Trade," knows whereof he speaks, because his own kin had been the most successful slave-trading family in the history of the United States.

In fact, one of his forbears, Senator James DeWolf of Rhode Island, was the second richest person in the country at the time of his death in 1837.

Moreover, the long-hidden truth revealed here indicates that, with the help of President Thomas Jefferson, he had been able to continue buying and selling Africans for years after the practice had technically been declared illegal.

The author only started learning about the strange fruit on his family tree in 2001, reading entries from an overseer's journal on one of the DeWolf family sugar plantations in Cuba:

April 9, 1821: Negroes look wild.

April 14, 1821: The first Negro I struck was this evening for laughing at prayers.

May 20, 1821: Two Negroes deserted.

September 28, 1821: Found two [slaves] this morning suspended by a rope in the woods not too far from the house. They were the two best on the plantation. I have not yet learned the cause of the unfortunate circumstance... Suffice it to say they

are no more. They had been hanging undoubtedly three days previous to the discovery.

January 20, 1823: The two that deserted yesterday came back this day... Four days in the stockade heavily ironed... Twenty-four lashes on the naked bottom each, after which lanced and rubbed down with rum and salt."

That summer, he and nine other relatives decided to explore their genealogy thoroughly by retracing the route of the Triangle Trade, from New England to West Africa and back to the Americas via the Middle Passage.

DeWolf's transformational journey is recounted in this moving, intimate and brutally honest memoir, which is compelling on its own, but should likewise serve as a fitting companion book to the family's upcoming TV special, "Traces of the Trade," airing on PBS on Tuesday, June 24th at 10PM.

## 50 Cent must keep NY property

NEW YORK — A judge has told rapper 50 Cent he may not dispose of the Long Island property where a \$2.4 million house was destroyed by fire last month.

State Supreme Court Justice Carol Edmead has also ordered 50 Cent, whose real name is Curtis Jackson, to put insurance proceeds in a trust account pending the outcome of his dispute with ex-girlfriend Shaniqua Tompkins.

Tompkins says Jackson promised her a house a decade ago, but had recently wanted to evict her and their 10-year-old son, Marquise, from the house in Dix Hills, New York.

The house in the Long Island neighborhood of Dix Hills was destroyed by a suspicious fire on May 30.

Tompkins, Marquise and four others were treated for smoke inhalation.