

# MOORE: From the top to bottom and back again

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free man trying to make amends.

His novel *For What I Hate I Do* (available at Amazon.com) is like many first fictions: highly autobiographical and, at times, sprinkled with clichés and clunky prose.

But the structure of the book is almost irrelevant. Moore has opened the door to issues taboo in the African-American community: sexuality, drug use, the down-low culture.

"We need to start facing our fears," Moore said. "If we continue to ignore the things that we struggle with, that's when we start to medicate ourselves with drugs and alcohol and sex. That leads to a lot of destructive behaviors."

These issues are not new, nor is this the first time they've been explored in print. Houston writer E. Lynn Harris has a series of novels about bisexuality in the black community. But where Harris' books are melodramatic in plot and flowery in prose, Moore's book is gritty, often detailing sexual acts and drug use.

"A lot of people like Harris' books, but frankly they're a bit too pretty for me," Moore tells the crowd. "I don't think he goes into details about what it's really like dealing with a lot of issues. I wanted to write something that was realistic and told the truth."

## Where did he go?

Truth is, the first time he robbed a bank he drove a rental car. His gut was twisting, and his hands were sweaty. He drove down Westheimer to rob a Starbucks but changed his mind because he was a part-time assistant manager at another Starbucks. He was afraid the police would be able to trace the crime back to him.

This was 1997. Instead of robbing Starbucks, he had coffee and contemplated the next step. He should rob a bank; it would have more money.

Down the street was a Randal's grocery store. Inside was a Wells Fargo.

Driving down Westheimer planning his first heist, he wondered what had happened to the man he used to be: high school

athlete, lady's man, NCAA track star. He was an alpha male, wasn't he?

Truth is, he had become a crack addict who solicited male prostitutes during his lunch breaks. A man carrying old pay stubs with *This is a robbery* scribbled on the back.

He drove to Randal's and sat in the parking lot. After a few minutes he went inside.

## The serial bank robber

Born in Houston's Fourth Ward, his family eventually moved to South Park, near MLK Boulevard. His parents, Jessie and Ardell, raised five kids. At Sterling High School, he reveled in the glory of track and the energy of cheering crowds.

He also ran track at West Texas State University (now West Texas A&M University). His good looks brought him modeling jobs. But he was soon confronted with an old issue he thought he left behind: He was attracted to both men and women.

He transferred to Mississippi State University, seeking a stronger track and field program and a change of scenery.

Scholarship money ran out his senior year, and he dropped out. He returned to Houston and a series of jobs: assistant manager at fast-food restaurants, customer-service representative for various companies.

Confident he could still make qualifying trials for the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea, he continued to train.

He didn't make the trials. Later that year, his father died.

"Those two things really did it for me," Moore said. "I couldn't handle not making the Olympics. And then the situation with my dad. I just blocked it out when he passed. I think I cried 10 years after he died. I just couldn't believe he was gone, you know? It was hard for me to deal with it..."

He self-medicated with sex and drugs and soon was addicted to both. He ignored the risks of this lifestyle and, in 1990, HIV became part of his world.

"I didn't cry about it," he said of his diagnosis. "I didn't connect with it because I didn't

want to admit it."

But he was a wreck, and something had to give. The rent was due. His car note was in default. His credit cards were maxed.

In all, he robbed six banks.

West Transfer Unit in Beeville.

## Finding himself

Finger-snapping gay men, quick with a sharp tongue and dressed as if going clubbing, had always annoyed him. He never identified with that image and was "always absolutely terrified" of drag queens. He didn't act gay.

So, he told himself, he wasn't.

But six years in prison taught him a few things. His early cellmates were effeminate gay men who were intelligent, down-to-earth guys. They became his confidants.

He kept a journal. He prayed. He wrote letters, asking those he hurt for understanding and forgiveness.

Terry Jackson, 34, who lives in Houston and was an inmate with Moore, recalled that when they met, Moore kept to himself, but the two eventually be-

came close.

"There's a lot of things in prison that can really make you unfocused," said Jackson, who was released last year after serving 11 years for armed robbery. "Everybody is trying to uphold their manhood and show how tough they are."

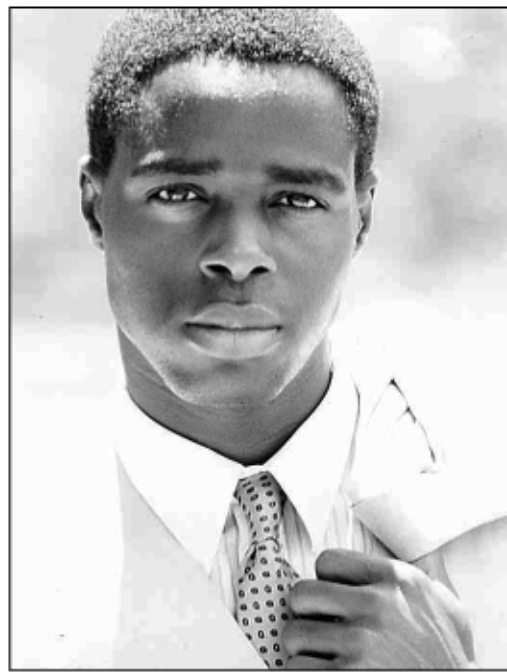
Moore and Jackson bonded over discussions about their past failures and future plans.

"We looked at all the mistakes we both made and the people we both hurt," Jackson said. "I was young at the time (of the robberies), and I wasn't thinking about all the people I hurt when I was doing it. But I hurt a lot of people. Michael did, too, and I think he was trying to deal with that."

He spent his time in prison reading and thinking. His favorite writers included Walter Mosley, John Grisham, Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou and Sigmund Freud.

The founder of psychoanalysis is known for his theories on identity and repression, arguing that human beings do not have immediate access to their inner selves and instead have a subconscious that's sometimes uncontrollable.

"I wanted to learn about human behavior," he said. "I wanted to know about my behavior, why I did the things that



**A MODEL YOUNG MAN:** As a college student, Michael Wayne Moore's good looks landed him work as a model.

He was caught after a bank teller noted the plate number on his rental car. He robbed banks with rental cars because he thought they wouldn't be able to trace them back to him.

His mother saw a report on television about a serial bank robber. When she looked at the screen, she squinted. Was that Michael?

"He called me up and said, 'Mama, I have something to tell you. Are you sitting down?'" Jessie Moore recalled. "I said yes, and that's when he told me that they got him for robbing those banks."

She stood by her son, though her resources were limited.

"I wasn't going to put my house up (as collateral), and I didn't have money for a lawyer," she recalled. "When I first heard about the robberies, I said, 'Oh, Lord! My child is going to get 40 years!'"

He was sentenced in 1997 to 15 years and sent to the Garza

"Those two things really did it for me. I couldn't handle not making the Olympics. And then the situation with my dad (dying). I just blocked it out when he passed. I think I cried 10 years after he died. I just couldn't believe he was gone, you know?"

—MICHAEL WAYNE MOORE

I did even though I knew they were wrong."

## His own future

He was released from prison in 2004. He landed a job at an energy company and later signed on as an electrician's apprentice at an electrical contracting company.

He plans to keep writing and wants to work on community development and revitalization projects in southeast Houston.

"I had to go through a lot of things," Moore said. "I was in denial about a lot of things and just want people to learn from my mistakes and not go through what I went through. I'm still living with my mistakes."

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