



A Gathering of Voices: The Longwood Writers Workshop

Extended Biography

DENISE NICHOLAS

As an actress, Denise Nicholas has been applauded for her portrayals of complex, resilient women on film, television and the stage, most memorably for her ground-breaking, starring role as high school guidance counselor Liz McIntyre on the ABC comedy-drama "Room 222," and for her co-starring role as Councilwoman Harriet DeLong on the drama series "In the Heat of the Night" opposite the late Carroll O'Connor.

Between those two long running series, Nicholas guest starred on shows as varied as "A Different World," "Flip," "Amen," "227," "Magnum P.I.," "The Cosby Show," "The Sophisticated Gents," and "My Wife and Kids" to name a few. She co-starred opposite Bill Cosby in the film "Ghost Dad" and opposite Sidney Poitier and Mr. Cosby in the films "Let's Do It Again" and "A Piece of the Action." Along the way, she has garnered three Golden Globe nominations and won three NAACP Image Awards. Nicholas is the recipient of two Los Angeles Emmy Awards for co-producing and performing in the PBS Special "Voices of My People: in Celebration of Black Poetry."

Denise began her career as a founding member of the Free Southern Theater, touring Mississippi and Louisiana during the most violent days of the civil rights movement. From there, she went on to New York auditioning for and being accepted into the Negro Ensemble Company, as a founding member of the first professional company. From the stage of the St. Marks Playhouse in New York, she was invited to screen test for the Liz McIntyre role on "Room 222." Her career in television had begun!

At the end of the "Heat of the Night" run, Denise, having written 6 episodes for that series under the mentorship of Carroll O'Connor, decided to devote her creative life to writing, the work she had always longed to do. She found her way to *WHITE OLEANDER* author Janet Fitch's Journeyman's Workshop and out of that nose-to-the-grindstone-experience came her novel, *FRESHWATER ROAD*. Denise's autobiographical debut novel was selected as one of the Best Books of 2005 by The Washington Post, The Detroit Free Press, The Atlanta Journal -Constitution, Newsday and The Chicago Tribune.

The Washington Post Book World Review wrote: "It's impossible to praise *FRESHWATER ROAD* too much. It is surely the best work of fiction about the civil rights movement since Ernest J. Gaines' *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MISS JANE PITTMAN*. The novel received a starred review in Publisher's Weekly which wrote: "Nicholas' novel is a rich, absorbing debut...sometimes gorgeous, sometimes terrifying, the debut of a talented writer." The novel went on to win the Zora Neal Hurston-Richard Wright Award for debut fiction, the American Library Association's Black Caucus Award for debut fiction and was a Simon & Schuster Book Club Pick as well as a Book Sense pick.

In 2008, Brown University presented a staged adaptation of *FRESHWATER ROAD* to full houses and critical acclaim.

In February 2014, Essence Magazine honored Denise for her involvement in the civil rights movement at its Black Women in Hollywood Luncheon.

Denise was born in Detroit and attended the University of Michigan. She later graduated from the University of Southern California. In addition to working in Janet Fitch's writing workshop for five years, Denise attended both the Squaw Valley Community of Writers Workshop and the Natalie Goldberg Writers Workshop in Taos, New Mexico. She has been published in the anthology *HANDS ON THE FREEDOM PLOW: PERSONAL ACCOUNTS BY WOMEN IN SNCC*, University of Illinois Press, Essence Magazine, The Washington Post, and The Huffington Post Blog. For the last three years, Ms. Nicholas has been a participant in the Sacramento Black Book Fair as author and as writing teacher. She is currently working on her memoir that will be published in 2025 by Agate Publishing, the same company that published *FRESHWATER ROAD*. Visit denisenicholas.net for additional information on Denise Nicholas.