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BEST-SELLING NOVELIST AND JOURNALIST BEBE MOORE CAMPBELL TO TACKLE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN DIVERSITY LECTURE SERIES TALK

DAYTON, Ohio — Bebe Moore Campbell's latest novel, 72-Hour Hold, has triggered "hundreds and hundreds" of e-mails from readers whose lives, too, have been touched by mental illness.

"I think I've become a stigma buster," she said in a telephone interview from her Los Angeles home. "People are beginning to confront the issue."

Campbell, who's been acclaimed by The Washington Post as "one of the most important African-American novelists of this century," will talk about the book, mental illness and the writing process in a free talk at 2 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 15, in the Sears Recital Hall in the Jesse Philips Humanities Center on campus. It's part of the University of Dayton's Diversity Lecture Series and one of three speaking engagements in the Dayton region over the next week. She will participate in a book signing at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 13, at Books & Co., 350 E. Stroop Rd., sponsored by the Trotwood Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. She also will present "Singing in the Comeback Choir" at 8 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 14, in Hall Auditorium at Miami University.

Campbell wrote 72-Hour Hold, a novel of redemption that grapples with mental illness in an African-American family, "out of my own experience," she said. "I have a mentally ill family member with bipolar disease." Her interest in mental health was the catalyst for her first children's book, Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry, which won the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Outstanding Literature Award for 2003. The book tells the story of...
how a little girl copes with being reared by her mentally ill mother. Campbell's 2003 play, "Even with the Madness," focused on mental illness. She co-founded the Inglewood, Calif., chapter of The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, an advocacy organization.

Campbell compares bipolar disease to slavery. "It enslaves the mind, and it enslaves the family members who watch helplessly while their loved ones are on the auction block, going deep South," she said.

People of color feel the stigma of mental illness the most. "In a race-conscious society, we don't want to be perceived as having yet another deficit," Campbell said. "Many of us are uninsured or underinsured, and we tend not to trust the medical establishment. We remember the experiments that took place at Tuskegee all too well. If you're talking about prescribing drugs for our minds, we're not trusting."

A novelist, journalist and National Public Radio "Morning Edition" commentator, Campbell has written three New York Times bestsellers, Brothers and Sisters, Singing in the Comeback Choir and What You Owe Me, also named an LA Times "Best Book of 2001" that was optioned by Showtime with Maya Angelou as director. Other novels include Your Blues Ain't Like Mine, a New York Times notable book and the winner of the NAACP Image Award for Literature; a memoir, Sweet Summer, Growing Up With and Without My Dad; and a non-fiction book, Successful Women, Angry Men: Backlash in the Two-Career Marriage. As a journalist, she's written for The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times and Ebony, as well as other publications.

What writers earn Campbell's admiration? "Toni Morrison's sentences are beautifully crafted. The rhythm of E.L. Doctorow is like swimming. I like his pacing."

For college students aspiring to see their name on book jackets, Campbell recommends that they read constantly, write continually and avoid romanticizing the profession — one of the hardest to break into and earn a living. Above all, writers need discipline.

"I get up and do it," she said. "I write a copious outline, then begin the process of writing. I do a lot of daydreaming, a lot of hearing of the characters."

The University of Dayton's Diversity Lecture Series — part of a larger strategic plan to foster inclusion and diversity on campus and prepare students, faculty, staff and the Dayton community for success in a global society — is co-sponsored by the offices of the president and provost with support from corporate partners, including the Dayton Daily News, WHIO-TV and WDAO-1210 AM.

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