

## Tina McElroy Ansa

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Tina McElroy Ansa is a novelist, publisher, filmmaker, teacher and journalist. But above all, she is a storyteller. She calls herself “part of a long and honored writing tradition, one of those little Southern girls who always knew she wanted to be a writer.” She grew up in Middle Georgia in the 1950s hearing her grandfather’s stories on the porch of her family home and strangers’ stories downtown in her father’s juke joint, which have inspired Mulberry, Georgia, the mythical world of her four novels, ***Baby of the Family***, ***Ugly Ways***, ***The Hand I Fan With*** and ***You Know Better***.



Photo credit: Jonee' Ansa

In March 2007, Ms. Ansa launched an independent publishing company, DownSouth Press, with its focus on African-American literature -- fiction and nonfiction. Her fifth novel, ***Taking After Mudear***, a sequel to her bestselling ***Ugly Ways***, will be the lead title on DownSouth Press’s first list in the spring of 2008. DownSouth Press will publish established as well as emerging literary voices.

Ms. Ansa’s first novel, ***Baby of the Family***, was published in 1989 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and was named a Notable Book of the Year by *The New York Times*. ***Baby of the Family*** was also on the African-America Best-seller List for Paperback Fiction. In October 2001, ***Baby of the Family*** was chosen by the Georgia Center for the Book as one of the “Top 25 books Every Georgian Should Read.” The book was also awarded The American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults in 1990, and won the 1989 Georgia Authors Series Award.

She and her husband, AFI (American Film Institute) Fellow filmmaker Joneé Ansa are currently adapting ***Baby of the Family*** for the screen in a feature film starring Alfre Woodard, Loretta Devine, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Vanessa Williams, Todd Bridges, Pam Grier, and Tonea Stewart. The author is collaborating with her husband on the screenplay for ***Baby of the Family***, which he will direct and shoot in her hometown of Macon, Georgia. Ms. Ansa is executive producer.

Harcourt Brace published Ms. Ansa’s second novel, ***Ugly Ways***, in July 1993. The African-America Blackboard List named the novel Best Fiction in 1994. Ms. Ansa was nominated for an NAACP Image Award in 1994 for ***Ugly Ways*** and the novel was on the African-American Best-sellers/Blackboard List for more than two years. In 2005, the novel was included in the current list of the “Top 25 Books Every Georgian Should Read” by the Georgia Center for the Book. Award-winning actress Alfre Woodard has entered into a partnership with Ms. Ansa to bring ***Ugly Ways*** to the screen.

***The Hand I Fan With***, her third novel, was published in October of 1996. This is the beautifully erotic love story of Lena McPherson and the 100-year old ghost – Herman – she calls up to love and cherish her. The novel was awarded the Georgia Authors Series Award for 1996. Ms. Ansa also won this same award for her debut novel, ***Baby of the Family***, and is the only two-time winner of the award.

Tina McElroy Ansa's fourth novel, ***You Know Better***, was published in Spring 2002 by William Morrow Publishers. The novel, told in the voices of three generations of the Pines women, is the story of LaShawndra Pines, a 19-year-old aspiring "hoochie mama" who aspires to dance in the background of a music video. It addresses the contemporary issues and ethos of young people and received a Best Fiction award by the American Library Association.

In 2005, Ms. Ansa was awarded the 2005 Stanley W. Lindberg Award for her body and work and for contributions to the literary arts community of Georgia. In 2002, Ms Ansa was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent at the Gwendolyn Brooks Center of Chicago State University.

In the fall of 2004, Ms. Ansa established the Sea Island Writers Retreats on Sapelo Island, Georgia which offers seminars in fiction, nonfiction, memoir and editing led by published writers and professional editors. The annual retreats seek to assist emerging and established writers in honing their work and skills in fiction, non-fiction, memoir and editing in sessions with professional writers and editors.

In 2006, she extended the writers retreats throughout the country with the Sea Island Writers Retreats...On the Road. The first two of these traveling literary retreats were held in Atlanta, Georgia on the Spelman College campus at the Women's Research and Resource Center in April 2006 and 2007 with best-selling authors, screenwriters and editors leading the workshop and lectures.

Together with Dazon Diallo of SisterLove Inc., in the spring of 2006, Ms. Ansa launched the South African African-American SisterLove Sisters Sharing (SAAASSS) book program that collects sizable numbers of signed books from African-American women authors that are shared with book clubs and organizations of women in South Africa. So far, the SAAASSS program has distributed more than 300 books through this on-going effort.

Tina McElroy Ansa has been a regular contributor to the award-winning television series CBS Sunday Morning with her essays, "Postcards from Georgia." She also writes magazine and newspaper articles, Op-Ed pieces and book reviews for the *Los Angeles Times*, *(New York) Newsday*, *The Atlanta Constitution*, and the *Florida Times-Union*. Her non-fiction work has appeared in *Essence Magazine*, *The Crisis Magazine*, *MS. Magazine*, *America Magazine*, and *Atlanta Magazine*.

She was a Writer-in-Residence at her alma mater, Spelman College, in Atlanta in the Fall of 1990 where she also taught creative writing. In addition to touring for her books and giving lectures, she has presented her work at the Smithsonian's African-American Center's Author's Series; the Richard Wright/Zora Neale Hurston Foundation; the PEN/Faulkner Reading Series and fundraisers at the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Schomburg Center, Savannah College of Art and Design and the PEN American

Center. She is on the Advisory Council for the Georgia Center for the Book and on the host committee for the Flannery O'Connor Awards.

Reflecting her concern with the issue of homelessness in this country, she has participated in fund-raising events including readings at the SOS-sponsored Writers Harvest at Georgia Tech in Atlanta and at the University of Georgia in Athens. She has also volunteered for fundraisers and house-buildings for Habitat for Humanity and has read at the Atlanta-based fundraisers for Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers.

In 2001, she founded the Good Lil' School Girl Foundation to promote and honor women of color of all ages for their contributions to the arts, community, health and spiritual growth. She has also established Good Lil' School Girl Book Clubs in grammar, middle and high schools around the country.

Tina McElroy Ansa was born in Macon, Georgia, the youngest of five children. In 1971, she graduated from Spelman College, the historically black women's college which is part of the Atlanta University Center. Her first job after college in 1971 was on the copy desk of *The Atlanta Constitution*, where she was the first black woman to work on the morning newspaper. During her eight years at *The Atlanta Constitution*, she worked as copy editor, makeup editor, layout editor, entertainment writer, features editor, and news reporter. She also worked as editor and copy editor for *The Charlotte (NC) Observer*. Since 1982, she has been a freelance journalist, newspaper columnist and writing workshop instructor at Brunswick College, Emory University, Paine College, Perimeter College and Spelman College, as well as lecturing at colleges, libraries, and cultural centers around the country.

She and her husband, Joneé Ansa, have lived on St. Simons Island, Georgia since 1984. Together they produced and directed the 1989 Georgia Sea Island Festival, a 30-year-old grassroots festival that seeks to preserve the crafts, music, slave chants, games, food and spirit of the African-American people who lived and worked as slaves on the rice and cotton plantations along the Georgia coast. Ms. Ansa is an avid birder, amateur naturalist, and gardener. She always has collard greens growing in her garden among the black-eyed Susans and moonflowers.

For more information on Ms. Ansa and to contact her, go to [www.tinamcelroyansa.com](http://www.tinamcelroyansa.com) or [www.downsouthpress.com](http://www.downsouthpress.com)