

## Sandra Ottey



Author Sandra Ottey, from the extraordinary Olympian Merlene Ottey family lineage, shares two heartfelt novels that encouragewomen to stay focus and remain on track. Ottey lives a very busy work and family life, but took time to devote to her passion for writing. SYM had the wonderful opportunity of attending her book signing this September at a beautiful brownstone mansion in the culturally diverse Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, New York. Launching her sequel 'Runaway Comeback' was well received, in attendance were friends, family, small business owners, media personalities, white collars and last, but not least, representatives from local political offices. So, it was only natural we followed up with an exclusive interview.

**SYM What was the inspiration that fueled this project?**

I wanted to encourage and inspire high school and college dropouts to pick themselves up and still go on to accomplish their educational goals and aspirations, despite having dropped out. I wanted to reiterate the fact that dropping out of school is indeed a setback, a bump in the road, even a mistake; but it doesn't have to be a dead end. Dropouts can pick themselves up, dust off the mishaps so to speak and continue a journey of realized goals and dreams, despite many unforeseen challenges.

**SYM What was your process of creating and developing the characters?**

I always know what role I want the characters to play in a story, even though that role may change later on. Also, I enjoy the freedom of doing almost anything with the development of the characters, as long as it follows the storyline. There are a few processes that I use when creating and developing characters. One I use a trait from my own personality, a friend's personality, maybe even something from a conversation I heard, or simply tap into that creative part of me that has the ability to take one characteristic from a few different persons and use them to create and develop a brand new multi-layered character.

**SYM In your novels Jamerican Connection and the sequel, Runaway Comeback is it your intent to only target the Jamaican community given the story primarily takes place in Jamaica as well as the fact that most of your readers are Jamaican?**

No, I actually write about global issues, so anybody can relate. The story is set in Mandeville, Jamaica, and Brooklyn, New York; and most of the characters have either lived in or visited both countries. People from all walks of life can relate to issues such as a woman's right to an education, experiencing infidelity, spousal abuse, and the strains that migration has on long distance relationships and family vitality.

**SYM How have readers responded to your novels?**

The responses I must say are extremely great! So far, readers have told me how much they can relate to the story. I wish I had the means of distributing my work to a wider audience so that more people will get the opportunity to read my work and be inspired.

**SYM Who is your favorite character besides Rose Thorn and why?**

I like Laverne Fine (Rose Thorn's best friend), because she epitomizes who a true, best friend really is. I also admire Laverne's passion for trying so hard to get a United States Visa so that she could go to Brooklyn to investigate her Jamerican lover's background, even though his mother was staunch on keeping a tight lid on their family secrets. I also admire her patriotism for staying in Jamaica and developing her cosmetology career there. However, I really liked how Laverne served as a look-out in Jamaica and tipped off Rose about her husband Donovan boarding a plane to American immediately as she witnessed it. That heads up to Rose was so vital; however, you will have to read both installments in order to experience Laverne's strong sense of loyalty.

**SYM How would you like to see this project evolve?**

Seeing my work on the big screen is the ultimate goal for me. In the meantime, I would like to inspire as many high school and college dropouts as possible to stay strong and not give up, to keep on pushing and getting back on track to realize their educational dreams and aspirations.

BY TILSA WRIGHT