

# EDGE OF SMOKE

## BY AUTHOR KARLYLE TOMMS

In the heart-wrenching narrative penned by the acclaimed author Karlyle Tomms, we are thrust into the haunting world of Pruitt Igoe, where the echoes of pain and resilience reverberate through the pages of his latest work. Set against the backdrop of 1960s St. Louis, Tomms paints a vivid portrait of Stephanie, a young soul ensnared in the cruel grip of poverty, addiction, and abuse.

From the outset, Tomms plunges us into Stephanie's tumultuous existence, where her very identity becomes a battleground against the forces of prejudice and violence. Raised by a heroin-addicted mother who refuses to acknowledge her femininity, Stephanie's journey is marked by harrowing trials, from the unspeakable horrors of exploitation to the tragic loss of her mother.

Yet, amidst the darkness, a beacon of hope emerges in the form of famed televangelist Pastor Ronald Dennison, whose compassionate intervention sets in motion a series of events that will forever alter Stephanie's fate. As she navigates the treacherous waters of foster care and persecution, Stephanie's resilience is put to the test, her unwavering determination to live authentically as a woman serving as a testament to the indomitable human spirit.

Through Tomms' masterful prose, we are transported into Stephanie's world, where every triumph and setback, every moment of joy and despair, is rendered with raw honesty and unflinching clarity. As Stephanie embarks on her journey of self-discovery and redemption, we are compelled to confront our own biases and preconceptions, to bear witness to the universal struggle for acceptance and belonging that defines the human experience. Karlyle Tomms' latest work delves into identity, trauma, and love, offering a powerful narrative that highlights the resilience of the human spirit. Through Stephanie's journey, readers are reminded of the transformative impact of compassion and empathy in overcoming adversity.

**GET YOUR COPY OF 'EDGE OF SMOKE' TODAY. AVAILABLE ON AMAZON AND BARNES & NOBLE IN KINDLE & PAPERBACK FORMAT.**



**KARLYLE TOMMS**

## JOURNEY AS AN AUTHOR

The passage paints a poignant picture of how a book, a sole connection to a lost parent, fueled a lifelong passion for writing. The author's father, a prisoner of war in World War II Japan, found his story documented in "Laughter in Hell" by Stephen Marek in 1954. This book became the only bridge between the author and their father during their childhood.

The author's mother left his father and returned to Arkansas, taking with her just the signed copy of the book. Raised by grandparents who disapproved of contact with their father, the author found solace and a fragile connection in "Laughter in Hell." It's this very book, the passage suggests, that sparked a love for writing within the author.

Their literary journey began at a young age, with their first play written in sixth grade followed by a steady stream of creative endeavors. However, frequent moves and unforgiving computer crashes claimed much of this early work. Despite these setbacks, a path in writing slowly emerged. The author secured a featured article position for several years with a regional magazine, their work appearing alongside established names like Alen Cohen and Father Leo Booth.

However, life had other plans. Tragedy forced a move back to the Ozarks, leading to a long period where writing took a backseat. The author only penned occasional articles commissioned by their employer for the local paper. It wasn't until the age of 58 that the dam finally broke, and the author completed their first novel. This achievement stands as a testament to the enduring power of that early inspiration. The passage concludes by hinting that this first novel was a pivotal moment, marking the beginning of a flourishing writing career.

In essence, the story chronicles how a book about the author's father became the catalyst for a lifelong love affair with writing. Despite facing challenges and setbacks, the author persevered, eventually finding their voice and achieving their dream of becoming a novelist. This journey highlights the transformative power of the written word, showcasing how a book can not only document the past but also inspire the creation of new stories.

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KARLYLE TOMMS**

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## THE INTERVIEW

WITH AUTHOR KARLYLE TOMMS

**Q: Your background growing up in rural Ozarks poverty is quite different from that of many authors. How have your personal experiences influenced your writing, particularly in "Edge of Smoke"?**

For my previous book, *The Calling Dream*, I used the background of my own childhood and the farm where I grew up in a four-room house with no running water to describe the scenes surrounding the protagonist's childhood surroundings. Of course, I also grew up gay in the Ozarks in the 1960s, and coming to terms with that has influenced both books. Stephanie, the transgender protagonist in *Edge of Smoke*, is introduced in *The Calling Dream*, and even though *The Calling Dream* is a story about a heterosexual man, it also has gay and transgender characters. Also, growing up in a fundamentalist, tiny rural church has influenced my spirituality, and I've come to understand Bible verses differently than how I understood them in my youth. I value Christianity, but I've become more eclectic when it comes to spirituality.

**Q: Transitioning from non-fiction to fiction can be a significant shift for any writer. What inspired you to venture into the realm of fiction, and what challenges did you encounter along the way?**

I've always written fiction in addition to non-fiction. I wrote a play when I was in the sixth grade after playing Bob Cratchit in a children's version of *A Christmas Carol*. I wrote poetry and short stories in high school and college, but ended up writing articles related to my previous profession as a social worker. I had attempted novels many times but had never been able to complete more than a few chapters before I got stuck and couldn't continue the story. When I discovered that I could write from the first person, allowing the protagonists to tell their story, that worked. I completed my first novel at the age of fifty-eight, and that was published in 2014. It is currently off the market while I make some revisions for my publisher.

**Q: Your novels are often described as deeply introspective and psychologically rich. How do you approach developing your characters and exploring their inner worlds?**

I allow the characters to develop themselves. I've said that the way I write is almost like channeling in that the characters tell me what they want to say and do and I record that into the story. I'm sure having worked for 42 years previously as a clinical social worker has influenced the introspection and psychology of the books. I've been told that I have a keen understanding of personalities.

**Q: "Edge of Smoke" explores themes of social, emotional, and spiritual challenges. Can you elaborate on how these themes manifest in the story and what message you hope readers will take away?**

If nothing else, I want readers to see the life of a transgender person and the struggles she faced while growing up and come to the realization that

transgender people are real people with the same hopes, dreams, and fears that others experience. In the end, Stephanie becomes the heroine of her own story. She is influenced by the character of Miss Mattie, an elderly Creole woman who loves and accepts her as she is but also guides her in developing the morals and ethics to overcome the trauma she experienced growing up in the slums and experiencing abuse.

**Q: Your writing style has been praised for its authenticity and emotional resonance. How do you ensure that your characters' voices ring true and resonate with readers?**

I think my characters resonate with readers because they face and deal with the same problems and challenges that others face. Some may not face challenges as severe as those of my protagonists, but the protagonists experience real human problems. Perhaps they resonate with readers because they learn how to face and deal with those problems. Their journey is always an awareness and a self-love journey, and I think most, if not all, of us can relate to that. *Life doesn't hold back, so why should I hold back with my writing?*

**Q: Many of your characters undergo significant transformations throughout your novels. What draws you to exploring the process of personal growth and evolution in your storytelling?**

I have had to go through my own process of personal growth and evolution. As I said earlier, I grew up gay in the Ozarks in a fundamentalist church in the 1960s. I had my own childhood traumas that I had to face and overcome, but I was also very lucky in that I had loving mentors who took me under their wings and guided me through that process. I think this is also why I chose a career in social work, where I could help others overcome similar challenges to those that I have faced. One of my memes that I create for social media says: No one is better prepared to lead you out of hell than someone who has been there. My characters go through hell, and like myself, they encounter mentors, sometimes unlikely mentors, who help to guide them to a better place.

**Q: As both a writer and a life coach, how do you see storytelling intersecting with personal growth and self-discovery?**

I'm not doing much in the way of life coaching these days and have declared writing to be my retirement career since retiring from my social work career in 2023. My storytelling intersects with personal growth because they are stories about people experiencing personal growth. Part of what I want to accomplish is letting people know that it is okay to ask for help, to work on themselves, and that things can and usually do get better when we do the work we need to do and make the changes we need to make. My books have epilogues or author's notes at the end. For instance, the epilogue of *Edge of Smoke* has information about LGBTQIA statistics and research as well as resources for seeking help.