

Reshonda Tate Billingsley: *More to Life*  
Toni Perling for Publishers Weekly

Somehow the milestones in NAACP Image Award-winning author Reshonda Tate Billingsley's life and career seem to be lining up at the same serendipitous moment. On her 50th birthday, she'll be celebrating the release of her 50th novel, *More to Life*, which just happens to be the sequel to her first book *My Brother's Keeper*. That debut novel, first published exactly 20 years ago, also coincides with the 20th anniversary of her publisher's imprint, Dafina Books.

But even with all of those impressive achievements, the renowned journalist, former television news anchor and motivational speaker would rather not be referred to as exceptional. Billingsley says she feels more like an "ordinary woman who goes that extra step to realize her dreams. That's what these milestones mean to me. It's a culmination of my dreams and indicative of what going that extra step can do for you."

That's also the powerful message of her latest book, *More to Life*, the emotional tale of Aja, a 45-year-old woman with a seemingly-enviable life -- a successful, devoted husband, two well-adjusted college-age kids and a tight group of girlfriends. But haunted by a difficult past and feeling trapped by her family's dependence on her, she finds herself stuck in the present, unable to fulfill her aspirations of becoming an artist and gallery owner -- until she decides to take off down a completely different road. But there are still plenty of unforeseen twists and turns that threaten to throw her off course.

*More to Life* was inspired by Billingsley's recent real-life experiences as a financially-struggling divorcee coming out of a 22-year marriage. The author acknowledges, "There is so much of me in Aja. So often well-meaning loved ones steer us down the 'safe' paths and we allow our creative dreams to be stifled. Unlike, Aja though, I managed to finally do both my dream of writing and have a family. But I had to work hard not to get lost in *their* dreams and allow mine to take a backseat."

Billingsley hopes that readers will take away another encouraging message as well. "It's never too late to start over," she says. "Whether you're changing courses because of divorce, death, retirement or simply dealing with a midlife crisis, it's never too late to follow your passion."

The timing also seemed right for the Houston-based author to revisit the popular characters introduced in *My Brother's Keeper*. "They've stayed with me. Not just because they were fan favorites, but because they were the first characters I gave birth to. So as I reflected over the past 20 years -- and where I am in life at this moment -- it seemed like the natural choice." And it wasn't hard for Billingsley get back into the mindset of Aja and family. "I've grown in the time since I've created them, so it was easy to reflect their growth as well."

Part of that growth includes Billingsley's success with Dafina – the leading publisher of commercial fiction written by and about people of African descent, in genres as diverse as women's fiction, street lit, romance, and inspirational fiction. "I love that women of all races love my books," Billingsley says. "And while Aja's story can resonate with anyone, it gives me pride to serve as a voice for African-American women."

*More to Life* definitely fits that definition. "I hope that women will find a way to not lose themselves in the quest to give their families all that they need. Whether that's relegating your passion to a side hobby, or not taking time for yourself, it's important that in the process of making way for them, you don't lose *you*."

After reflecting on 50 novels and 20 years in the publishing industry, she's also learned a little something about the business side of writing. Instead of saving for the long haul, "I'd sell some books, go buy some shoes," she laughs. "But other than that, I don't have many regrets in my publishing career. Even my mistakes were never looked at as failures, but rather as lessons."