

Freedom and Power:

A Talk with Zelda Lockhart
by Sara Whitestone



COURTESY OF ZELDA LOCKHART

“You can’t influence
another universe and
write a whole world
when you don’t fully
know your own.”

—Zelda Lockhart

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¹ Rev. of *Fifth Born* by Zelda Lockhart, *Publisher’s Weekly* 29 July 2002: www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-7434-1265-0; *Kirkus Review* 1 June 2002: www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/zelda-lockhart/fifth-born/#review.

As a child, Zelda Lockhart, like her character Odessa, split her time between rural Mississippi and St. Louis. She earned her college degrees in Virginia, a bachelor’s from Norfolk State University and a master’s from Old Dominion University. Now Lockhart calls Hillsborough, North Carolina, home, and she was selected to be the Piedmont Laureate of 2010. She is also a mother and a grandmother and gains much inspiration from her family.

As a newcomer to fiction writing, Lockhart met *Bastard Out of Carolina* author Dorothy Allison at a writing workshop in upstate New York. It was Allison, Lockhart says in her first novel’s acknowledgements page, who first let the author “know [she] was writing fiction.” This first novel, *Fifth Born*, published by Washington Square Press, an imprint of Simon and Schuster, was a 2002 Barnes & Noble Discovery selection and a finalist for the debut fiction award from the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Legacy Foundation. Lockhart’s second novel, *Cold Running Creek* (LaVenson Press, 2007), was chosen by the Black Caucus of the American Library Association for the 2008 Honor Fiction Award and was required reading for all freshmen at North Carolina A&T State University in 2008–2009. Her third novel, a sequel to the first, *Fifth Born II: The Hundredth Turtle* (LaVenson Press, 2010), was a finalist for the 2011 Lambda Literary Awards.

Fifth Born and *Fifth Born II* follow the main character, Odessa, from early childhood to young adulthood. As a child, Odessa suffers emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. As she matures, she tries to rebuild her relationship with her mother and to understand her brother’s homosexuality. *Publisher’s Weekly* wrote of *Fifth Born*, “Lockhart’s narrative is straightforward and lyrical, Odessa’s voice is believable and the evolution of her character in the face of overwhelming alienation is as engaging as it is heartbreaking.” *Kirkus Review* lauded *Fifth Born* as “an impressively mature piece of work.”¹ *Fifth Born II* includes a back cover blurb by Dorothy Allison describing the novel as “an unflinching view of the human spirit surviving adversity, confronting despair with stubbornness and wry humor, and achieving levels of insight that display a genuine sense of compassion.”