

He's Nationwide

Renay Jackson's street savvy and knowledge of Oakland's rougher side have made die-hard fans out of his core audience of readers, which until now has been mostly African-American. But Jackson believes his novels can break through to a larger and more diverse audience.

His local literary reputation is well intact, thanks in part to having launched his writing career by selling his gritty, self-published novels out of the trunk of his car. His income, for the most part, is from working as a custodian for the city of Oakland for 25 years and, most recently, for the police department.

Jackson, a fast-talking and ardent self-promoter—whose fiction has been categorized as gangster/ghetto/hip-hop—is serious about going nationwide and international. So when the San Francisco Chronicle approached him for a series on local authors, he complied, boldly predicting the Chron interview would turn into an opus on him.

His prediction was dead on, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The article caught the eye of Berkeley-based Frog Ltd. Though several East Coast publishers wooed him with big advances and even bigger promises, Jackson chose Frog. "I felt comfortable with them from

the beginning. They were upfront and honest," Jackson says.

His fast-paced books are based on the Oakland he's lived and survived in. "Oaktown Devil," his first novel, depicts the raw side of Oakland, where drugs and violence are commonplace and people are struggling just to get by. Whether they're money-hungry, drug-dealing thugs or washed-out women trapped in a life they didn't choose, it's an endless cycle of brutality that speaks to the tragedy that is still witnessed on Oakland's streets.

Frog will publish Jackson's first five books over the next two years. He is currently working on his sixth installment, "Sweet Pea's Secret."

—Brooke Warner



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480,000

In dollars, the median home price in Oakland. Prices of homes in Oakland have gone up 77 percent since 1990.

1,960

Number of Canadian tourists who visit Oakland home at Lake Merritt each year (during the summer molting season through early July). The number of tourists has consistently been between 1,500 and 2,000.

146

Age, in years, of the oldest building in Oakland, the American sanctuary at 146th Street and African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was founded in 1850.

402,777

Oakland's population in 2003.

250,000

The cost, in dollars, of the Hotel when Claude R. Riffe bought the property in 1929 when he was the hotel's manager.

Sources: www.BART.gov, CSW Real Estate Research, www.oaklandnet.com, www.claremont.org