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Meet Shaundale Rénā



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We caught up with the brilliant and insightful Shaundale Rénā a few weeks ago and have shared our conversation below.

Hi Shaundale, thanks for joining us today. Let’s start big picture. What are some of biggest trends you are seeing in your industry?

The biggest trend I’m seeing in publishing is the increase in writers who are requesting Black editors, specifically Black female editors. Some of the major traditional publishers are finding freelance editors to outsource editing projects to because Black writers are asking for Black representation. They want editors who will not rewrite their story or misunderstand their language or misinterpret what they are actually saying. Many of them have also expressed their frustration with having to explain things as simple as “Madea,” or why the nape is called “the kitchen,” or any number of simple phrases or expressions that are common to Black people.

What I’m also noticing is the number of non-persons of color who are looking for beta or sensitivity reads. This happens when a non-Black author chooses to write about a Black person

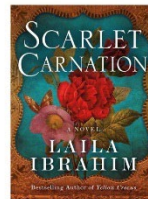
or topic. They may have created an African-American character or chosen a historical event and want to be sure they don't "whitewash" or offend. I have been hired to read and/or edit several books in this space, and the authors are sincere in their efforts to write about (or from) the Black experience as best they can, and they look for me to help them safely navigate the language, personality, and tone of the characters they are displaying or the topics they are discussing. A successful collaboration looks like Laila Ibrahim's *Scarlet Carnations* below. This book is the final story of a historical fiction series about the delicate relationship between a runaway slave and her contributions to raising the slave owner's daughter, a bond not so easily broken, even after she finds her freedom.

Great! Appreciate you sharing that with us. Before we ask you to share more of your insights, can you take a moment to introduce yourself to our readers and tell us how you got to where you are today?

I got into editing because of my love for reading. As a child, I often read more than I watched television. The only thing I remember doing more than reading was playing with my tea sets and dolls; even then, I'm sure I read to them.

After I released my first book back in 2009, something I always knew I'd do, I was asked to do a number of things to assist new writers. Editing was simply the one that continued to evolve. I'd gone from a love of reading and writing to a love of editing, seemingly overnight. I was drawn to helping people, even though I had only published one book myself and was still figuring things out. Still, some people saw that as proof that if I could do it, they could do it—with my help. And that's how I got dragged into editing, soon followed by coaching. It went from a hobby I thoroughly enjoyed to a full-fledged business I dearly love in only a few short years. That's when I had to start making decisions about my real job and my childhood dream. I could no longer work 40-45 hours each week on a nine-to-five and still put in an additional 20-30 hours

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Grateful for opportunities that place me where I'm supposed to be.

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at home. It was hard working all day, Monday through Friday (sometimes Saturday), and still manage to stay up until three, four (sometimes, five or six) the next morning and do it all over again. When my dreams started to compete with my nightmare, my dreams won.

Initially, I started editing for friends and family to ultimately getting certified as a technical writer and later editing for people who were referred to me. As this continued, I began to have days where I was booked three to four months in advance with people I did not know. These people waited to work with me. Literally. It was eye-opening. It was also confirmation that I was where I was supposed to be—where I'd always wanted to be—and hadn't realized it.

After years of trying to be all things to everybody, I started to notice that I felt differently about the various types of editing. While I could do them all, I did not enjoy doing so. Once I realized that although I could copy and line edit, I accepted that I absolutely loved developmental editing, and I was sold. The technical aspects of editing are definitely needed; however, the creative freedom developmental editing brings is priceless. I was good at copyediting, but I am highly gifted in developmental editing. I am thorough, clear, and serious about my craft. For starters, one must know the rules in order to break them, so copyeditors know the how's, when's, and why's behind what is being done when they make their marks. I love that rules are in place for it but also appreciate someone who can bend them and still make the story flow. What I don't like is a writer blowing through the rules, hiring a copyeditor and choosing to not listen to the person they hired to assess and correct their file. Nevertheless, being able to develop content for writers who don't fully connect the dots from one page, chapter, or character to another has been life-changing. It was then that writing was no longer



just something I did; it was no longer just a hobby (of sorts). In fact, I needed to find a new hobby. I turned to yardwork.

I later quit my full-time job in April 2021; by January 2022, I was booked through June. It took finding my zone of genius and being intentional about providing services I know I'm great at. Like many, I'm good at several things, however, I am great at a few. Developmental editing is one of the few (so is weeding). There are other things, but none bring me the satisfaction that developmental editing has over the last year and half that I have focused solely on it. What I'm

able to offer my clients is a well-written manuscript and genuine feedback in the form of an editorial review. I not only tell them what's needed, but I also show them how to do it. Then we commence to working together to get it done. The process is sincerely rewarding on multiple levels.

For instance, what I'm most proud of in my nearly 10 years of editing is collaborating with the world-renowned Queen Afua on "Impeccable Listening" (City of Wellness Publishing) as well as working with Oludara Adeeyo on "Self-Care for Black Women" (Adams Media/Simon & Schuster) and Laila Ibrahim on "Scarlet Carnation" (Lake Union/Amazon Publishing). All three of these ladies are successfully traditionally published authors; two are award-winning and bestselling authors. They are all internationally known, and each of them entrusted their stories to me. I was able to read, gather my thoughts, apply those thoughts to their content, and help them turn the final copy into something extraordinary (although I may be partial). I also relish that I am an international editor with multiple Amazon bestsellers. As such, I have been afforded many opportunities to touch people's lives through those who also touch others' lives. That is most important to me—that and telling a good, well-written story. Those books rock! And I get to hang my hat on knowing I contributed. Whether it was adding content, rearranging content, or deleting content altogether, I was able to participate in their literary journey.



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Since we all have a responsibility to use our gifts to make the world a better place, in my honest opinion, there is no place other than a creative one that can foster people's opinions. Folks have many thoughts about what others should be doing, but only when it is solicited can it be useful. Sure, it may be helpful 24/7, but who asked you for it? If nobody asked you for your opinion, then, by default, it doesn't matter—even if it can help. The joy I have is that people seek me out for my professional services and my ability to help them—not just offer them another unsolicited opinion. I add value they know they can't find anywhere else by combing through their stories, looking for what others will not see or what they failed to notice themselves. I matter. They matter. And I aim to make sure their books matter because their stories matter.



Can you tell us about what's worked well for you in terms of growing your clientele?

Because my clients know they matter, word-of-mouth referrals have served me well. From one project to another, I am grateful to have the feedback I've been afforded when clients complete their files. I love going beyond because I enjoy what I do and for whom I do it. This keeps me busy. Clients recommend me to their friends and family, colleagues, church members, etc. They also return themselves, which I believe is the highest compliment. They come back, and they bring others with them. When that happens, we all win. Each time I hear or see a review that says, "Shaundale

gave me more than I paid for," or "You went above and beyond what I thought I'd get," I am pleased to do it all over again, and I do—for the next client.

Looking back, are there any resources you wish you knew about earlier in your creative journey?

Yes! The only thing I wish I'd known about sooner is Black Editors & Proofreaders (BEP) Network. While I was able to maintain when I first started out, it wasn't until I connected with BEP that business soared. Ninety percent of clients come from those who stumble upon the BEP website looking for editors of color, particularly female editors of color. Had I known about them when I first started, I probably could have quit my day job years earlier. I'd also be able to travel like I wanted (pre-pandemic).



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