



Kristin Hunter Lattany

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Up until now one of my motivating forces has been to recreate the world I know into a world I wish I could be in. Hence my optimism and happy endings. But I've never dreamed I could actually reshape the real world. I am committed to telling the truth. I think I've always been a realistic writer, and I'm not just into the agony and happiness of black women. I'm interested in the enormous and varied adaptations of black people to the distorting, terrifying restrictions of society. Maybe that's why there's cheer and humor in my books. I marvel at the many ways we, as black people, bend but do not break in order to survive. This astonishes me, and what excites me I write about. Every one of us is a wonder. Every one of us has a story.

— From an interview with Claudia Tate

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Quick Facts

- * Born in 1931
- * African-American novelist, children's book author, and educator
- * First published novel was *God Bless the Child*

Biography

Born September 12, 1931, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Kristin Eggleston Hunter Lattany is the daughter of George Lorenzo Hunter, a school principal and U.S. army colonel, and Mabel Hunter, a pharmacist and school teacher. Kristin married John I. Lattany, June 22, 1968. In addition to being a novelist, a wife and a mother, Lattany has worked as an elementary school teacher, advertising copywriter, television scriptwriter, and professor of creative writing at the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her degree. Lattany has been a writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and an information officer for the city of Philadelphia.

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Kristin Hunter Lattany

Biography continued

As of 2002, she is the author of ten published works of fiction, four for children and six for adults. Most of Lattany's novels have been widely translated and well received. Claudia Tate asked Lattany which writers have impressed her the most, and Lattany responded by saying, "at one time it was J.P. Donleavy; then it was Steinbeck. Colette is the one I admire the most. There are other people whom I admire, but I don't even attempt to write like them" (87). Lattany names Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara as writers whom she admires for different reasons. After a very prolific writing and teaching career, including 23 years as a professor in the English Department of the University of Pennsylvania, Lattany retired in 1995. Lattany now lives with her husband and children in Camden, New Jersey. Lattany is a member of the Authors League of America, Authors Guild, Modern Language Council of Association, PEN, National Council of Teachers of English, and the University of Pennsylvania Alumnae Association. Kristin Hunter Lattany has received many awards during her lifetime:

1960: Philadelphia Athenaeum Award in 1960

1968: National Council on Interracial Books for the Children Award in 1968 for *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*

1969: Mass Media Brotherhood Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews for *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*

1971: Lewis-Carroll Lewis Award

1973: Book Festival Award

1974: Christopher Award, for *Guest in the Promised Land*

1981: New Jersey State Council on Arts Prose Fellowship

1983: Pennsylvania State Council on Arts Literature Fellowship

1996: Moonstone Black Writing Celebration Lifetime Achievement Award

Lattany's first novel, *God Bless the Child* (1964), "is a lively, sharp, swarming story of people." The main character, Rosie Fleming, lives in a segregated neighborhood in a northern city. Her plans are to make money and to find a better life for grandmother and herself. However, she doesn't understand why the system makes life so difficult for her.



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Henrietta Buck of the *Christian Science Monitor*, says, “The book sounds like social tract. It’s not. It is a story of people who have had the doors slammed on them once too often, who have become hobbled by the moral deformities of a fabricated society. The life they lead is like an immense, macabre charade, which act out conditions of privilege and security. When the unreality becomes too great, then the police arrive, bottles fly, the nightsticks crack, and the rest of the world watches from the safe side of the invisible boundary.”

Lattany’s novel *The Landlord* (1966) was made into a movie in 1970. It is a story of a man searching for identity. Enders, a white man, is the landlord of a building in the inner city. To defy stereotypes of himself and Blacks, Enders buys an apartment building in the inner city, moves into the building, and tries to prove to all that he is an individual, not just an absent landlord. He encounters many conflicts during the identity quest.

The Soul Brother and Sister Lou (1968) gained Lattany recognition as an author of young adult literature. This book is about a juvenile gang led by Louretta Hawkins, a 14-year-old who forms a successful music group to avoid the pressures of gang warfare and police harassment. *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* was praised for its authentic portrayal of growing up in hostile surroundings and for its affirmation of black culture. However, some critics disliked its happy ending. In 1981 Lattany published its sequel, *Lou in the Limelight*.

Boss Cat (1971) is a collection of short stories for children. *Guest in the Promised Land*, published in 1973, is a collection of stories about the search of values and direction. It portrays how hatred and violence are created by condescension. Lattany’s novel *The Survivors* (1975) portrays a friendship between an adult and a junior high school student.



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The *Lakestown Rebellion* (1978) focuses on the successful struggle of residents in an all black town to stop the construction of an interstate, which would destroy their community. Lattany's novel *Kinfolks* (1996) earned her the reputation of a great African-American writer. According to Lillian Lewis of *Booklist*, "Lattany has woven an incredible story about the complexities and frailties of love and relationships and the primacy of family. *Kinfolks* is about recognizing that no matter how strong or weak the bloodlines, in time of trouble, family is the one certainty that people really count on. "

The story revolves around two female best friends who are planning the wedding of their children, only to discover the children have the same father; the wedding is cancelled, but everyone remains friends. Her latest novel is *Do Unto Others* (2000). If you're looking for a book filled with African pride, then this book is perfect for you. Lattany fills this book with so much Afrocentricity, it is overflowing with the spirit of the motherland. The story starts with Zena, the main character, who is a successful hairdresser in love with every aspect of her African culture. She has African clothes, jewelry, art and sculptures; she has even brought her husband an African spear shield. One afternoon Zena attends her "Downtown Divas" meeting and is introduced to two Africans -- a professor and her sister Ifa, who is a model. They put on a fashion show for the "Downtown Divas" and sell everything off of Ifa's back. Zena is astonished by Ifa's beauty. Zena ends up letting Ifa stay in her house and a lot of strange things begin to happen. She begins to hear things because of the African goddess' presence. Things even get ugly for awhile between Zena and her husband. When Ifa gets into trouble and ends up going to jail, Zena has a change of heart and her husband gets Ifa out of jail.

Kristin Hunter Lattany is enjoying her retirement in southern New Jersey. Lattany, who is from the North, is interested in doing collaborative work with her husband, John Lattany, who is from Georgia. She hopes that the collaboration, which would show how Blacks in the rural South were successful in the past, would inspire success in future generations. Lattany is also interested in developing a comic screenplay.



Kristin Hunter Lattany

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