

Getting By

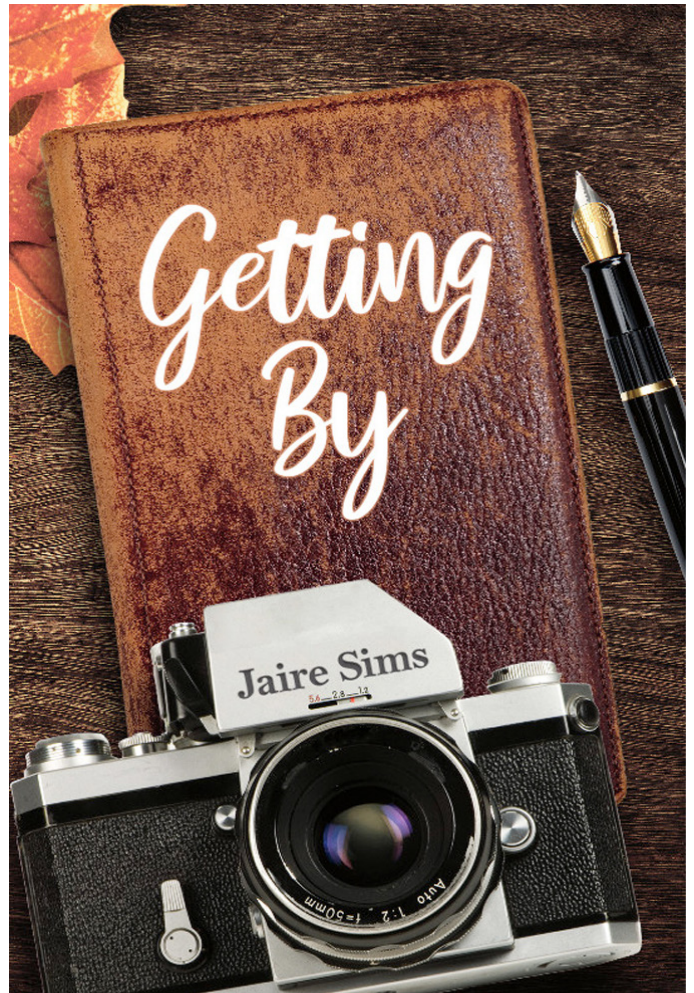
Jaire Sims

A coming of age story for a young and gay African-American!

Carver Goodman is a 17-year-old African American student who aspires to become a photographer. As if balancing school, homework, extracurricular activities, and the ACT wasn't enough, Carver is frequently targeted by violent bullies and is struggling to understand his sexuality while he develops his first romantic relationship. When his spot as one of the top students in school is jeopardized under the strain of the increasing challenges in his life, Carver knows something has to change. But what should he do, and how can he do it without getting hurt or hurting anyone else in the process?

“Brutally frank and moving.”

—Michael R. French, award-winning YA novelist



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“My intention was to tell a story that would resonate with readers who needed to see more books about people like themselves.”

—Jaire Sims, Author

Jaire Malik Sims was born and raised in Chicago and *Getting By* is his first published book. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Communication Studies and was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome while attending college.

Jaire began writing *Getting By* when he was seventeen and focused on crafting a narrative that highlighted a lead character with specific traits that he felt were under-represented in media: namely, a young man who is a non-stereotypical African American, gay, and autistic.

Quick Facts

Title: Getting By

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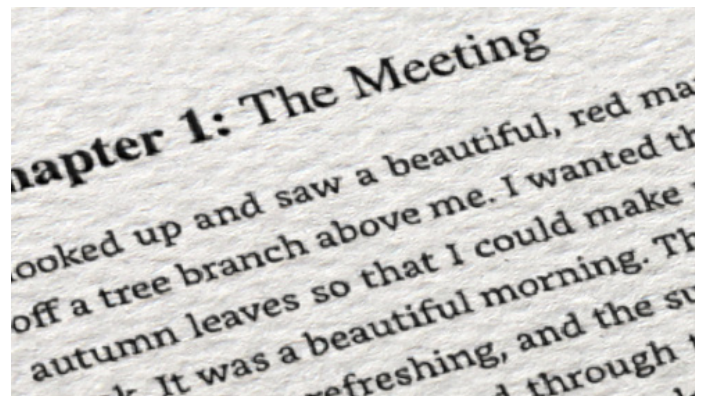
Size: 5.5" x 8.5"

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Available at: Bookshop

Website: jairesims.com





Biography

Jaire Sims was born and raised on the far southwest side of Chicago. Even at a young age, Jaire was not known for his talkative behavior. He was able to make casual friends in elementary school and high school, but he never succeeded in making those friendships close or imitate.

Sims strived to get good grades and often made the Honor List in elementary school. He was a straight “A” student in high school and became class valedictorian in 2012.

Although Sims excelled at grades in high school, his difficulty with socializing began to manifest as a teenager. Due to his quiet nature and frequent experiences with social anxiety, Jaire was an easy target to teasing and bullying during his adolescence. His difficulties with socializing during his college years subsequently led him to see a clinical professional counselor and take a mental health assessment. While twenty-one, and a junior in college, Jaire was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome. A year later, he graduated from Monmouth College with a Bachelor’s Degree in Communication Studies.

Jaire has restricted interests, which makes it difficult for him to have and maintain casual conversations with people. He developed an interest in all things Disney in high school and still enjoys talking about his favorite Disney films and songs. Sims was often told that he had strong writing skills during his school years. This encouragement played a part in motivating him to write his first novel, *Getting By*, which Jaire hopes will reach certain demographics who share commonalities with him and perhaps inspire them to write their own stories while taking inspirations from their life experiences.

Jaire Sims was born and raised in Chicago and *Getting By* is his debut novel. He received his Bachelor’s Degree in Communication Studies and was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome while attending college.

Why I Wrote This Book

I began writing Getting By when I was seventeen.

My intention was to tell a story that would resonate with readers who wanted and needed to read more books and stories about people like themselves. I focused on crafting a narrative that highlighted a lead character with specific traits that I felt was underrepresented in media: namely, a young man who is a non-stereotypical African American, gay, and autistic. As someone who shares these characteristics, I wanted my story to focus on this narrative arc. I also felt I could bring an air of authenticity to this not-so-typical “coming of age” story.

Although my book is a fictional piece, it does take inspiration from real life experiences from my teens and early twenties. Growing up as an African American, I did not share some of the more common attributes that Black male characters

had in mainstream media. I was not athletic; I did not have a talent for singing or dancing, and rap and hip-hop music was never my preferred genre to listen to. Additionally, I frequently strayed from societal norms that were viewed as masculine. Furthermore, my experiences that led to me being diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome provided further inspiration to create a character that deviated from stereotypical traits of Black men while also being authentic.

My hope was to create a story that my target audience could strongly relate to. Getting By is a story that I wish I could have read as a teenager. I hope my writing inspires others to share their own stories so that readers of all types might feel less underrepresented, and readers in general will learn about people and cultures that differ from that which they know.



“Growing up as an African American, I did not share some of the more common attributes that Black male characters had in mainstream media.”

Q & A

1 What was your intention in writing *Getting By*?

What was your hope?

ANSWER: My intention in writing *Getting By* was to tell a story that would resonate with my target audience. As an African American, I wanted to create a lead character that deviated from stereotypical portrayals of Black men by having certain attributes and experiences that my readers would share commonalities with. My hope is that my story will inspire or motivate readers to share their stories, personal or fictional, in the medium of their choice.

2 As a writer of color, is there anything you would like to say to others in minority groups who have their own stories to tell?

ANSWER: Yes! That it's never too late to tell your story. If you have experienced situations or events that you want to express through writing, I strongly encourage you to start writing about it. The easiest way for me to tell my story was through fiction writing, so I suggest figuring out how you want to tell your story and just begin writing. There's no time like the present.

3 You were diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome during college.

How do you feel this was represented in your writing style?

ANSWER: Initially, I did not intend for my lead character to have Asperger's Syndrome, and it was added during the revision process. I made this decision partly because I felt that my character showed subtle signs of being autistic throughout the book. I tried to expand it a little by incorporating my experiences with having autism into the book while being descriptive regarding the character's thoughts in social situations.

4 You've said that one of your goals in writing *Getting By* was to lend a voice to more people in the African American, LGBTQ+, and autistic communities. How do you feel the impact of your story changes by writing for teens rather than adults?

ANSWER: The teenage years are a huge and pivotal part of growing up. It is a time when a person goes through a lot of physical, mental, and emotional changes. I felt writing a story like mine would have the biggest impact on this demographic because it presents themes that a lot of teenagers experience in their own lives.

5 You've mentioned that you wanted to write a story depicting a non-stereotypical young Black male. What do you hope will be the impact of writing and offering such a unique character?

ANSWER: I wanted my readers to be able to see a side of a Black male character that I believe is not commonly offered in writing today. I hope this will lead to aspiring writers who are able to create Black characters who have interests, attributes, and experiences that they believe is not seen or offered in mainstream writing today. The story arc for my lead character is just one of many that can be told for Black youths.

6 The main character, Carver, demonstrates very healthy relationships with his female friends. What are you hoping other young men learn from these respectful friendships?

ANSWER: My hope is that Carver's friendships and relationships with the female characters in *Getting By* will help to influence male readers' ways of thinking regarding masculinity and behaviors towards women. In my opinion, showing positive behaviors, such as tenderness, thoughtfulness, and respect doesn't make a man less masculine or appealing.

Q & A continued

7 Do you have your next book in mind, or perhaps a sequel to *Getting By*?

ANSWER: I'm currently writing another story entitled *Patience*. It's a continuation of *Getting By* and takes place approximately ten years after the first book. The lead character pursues a homosexual relationship for the first time, and his experiences with Asperger's Syndrome will play a bigger role in this story.

8 Of the under-represented groups (African American, LGBTQ+, Autistic) you've depicted in *Getting By*, which do you feel is in the most need of more representation in mainstream media, and why?

ANSWER: In my opinion, African Americans on the autism spectrum are woefully underrepresented in mainstream media. Typically, I see white actors playing autistic characters in movies and television shows, and this plays a part in the stigma that autism predominantly affects one racial group. The underrepresentation of Black people with autism is one of the main reasons why I made the decision for my character to have autism.

9 Do you think your love of animation played any part in how you crafted the story in *Getting By*?

ANSWER: A common symptom of Asperger's Syndrome is having one or more intensely focused interests. For me, that is ALL THINGS DISNEY, and I wanted my lead character to share the same obsession I have for the subject. Carver's favorite Disney songs, movies, and characters are mine too.

10 Who were some of your biggest supporters when you started writing your novel and what has their support meant to you?

ANSWER: I've hardly told anyone about my story, and it's been fairly recent that I've begun to tell more people about my book. I wanted to wait until I was getting close to the publishing date before telling anyone in greater detail. One of the first people I informed about my novel was a former co-worker who told me that she would buy my book when it was released. Her support meant a lot to me because we both love Disney, and I want my book to reach as many readers who share my enthusiasm for animation. I also told my younger sister about my experience with writing and publishing my novel, and I was thankful to have a family member who expressed full support and encouragement for my book.

11 Which book or books (author/authors) had the biggest impact on you as a writer? Has that changed since you've reached adulthood?

ANSWER: I read David Klass' novel *You Don't Know Me* when I was a teenager, and it inspired me to write my own novel. When I began writing my book, I took inspiration from a few novels in *The Bluford Series* that I had read in middle school. This series showed me how I could write a teen/young adult fiction book that focuses mostly on Black characters.

12 How can someone buy your book?

ANSWER: *Getting By* is available for purchase at your local independent bookstore through BookShop at <https://bookshop.org>.

Praise

“Sims cultivates the ability to present a multifaceted young personality on the cusp of various types of changes and confrontations in life. In creating a talented, aspiring young man who is facing both the pinnacle of success and some of his greatest personal challenges for building a different future goal, Jaire Sims goes far beyond getting by with stereotypical scenarios and approaches.”

—Diane Donovan

Senior Book Reviewer - Midwest Book Review

“Sims’s simple, accessible prose give windows into Carver’s life as he struggles with questions about his identity and sexuality while trying to deal with the harassment... This is a moving debut.”

—Tina S.

Book Reviewer - The Prairies Book Review

“Sims delicately paints a portrait of his character, Carver, a young man who seems just as normal as any other kid in a crowded high school hallway. As Carver encounters the love and hatred of youth, Sims invites his readers to discover a deeply sensitive and complex character’s inner world. Getting By reminds us to pause and look closer at the intersection of our identities to discover who we truly are.”

—Cara Boardman

Educator, Trainer, Developer - Wiley Education Services

“Sims breathes life into a complex figure who is both refreshingly unique yet intimately familiar, managing to deftly and artistically capture both the innocent vitality of youth and also the strains and struggle of coming of age as a minority. The character invites us to empathize and connect; essential qualities that are especially relevant in an age of division.”

—Steven Millard, MAT

CME Manager, Center for Continuing Medical Education

The University of Chicago Biological Sciences & The Pritzker School of Medicine

“A wonderful, brutally frank, and moving young adult novel. Very few first time authors are able to dig as deeply as Jaire Sims has dug into his unusually challenging youth as a black man different from most others. Reminded me of the 2016 Oscar-winning film Moonlight.”

—Michael R. French

Award-Winning Young Adult Novelist - Author of *Anyone Can Run, She Said*

“Getting By illuminates the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and ability and contributes a unique voice to the landscape of YA literature in need of queer Black male protagonists. There are far too many young readers whose lives aren’t reflected in the journeys of characters who resemble themselves. In Getting By, Carver, recently diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, struggles to accept and embrace his sexuality as he navigates the lower tiers of the high school social hierarchy and the bullying that accompanies the denunciation of unspoken rules prescribed for the socially acceptable performance of Black masculinity.”

—Trudi K. Peterson PhD

Professor, Chair, Communications Studies Coordinator

Women’s Studies Program - Monmouth College

“Getting By creates a familiar and believable world of high school as many of us will remember it. Jaire’s main character, Carver, is developed with a richness and empathy that makes the reader want to root for him to succeed in overcoming the obstacles created by those who don’t understand his inherent value. As Carver learns to cope with being different from the typical adolescent male, he navigates the complexities of high school, makes friends, confronts serious challenges and engages a social world that is difficult and strange to him. I recommend this book to any young reader who is interested in seeing high school through a different set of eyes.”

—Lee McGaan

Professor Emeritus

Department of Communication Studies - Monmouth College