

Publishing house accepts college student's novel

By The College Press Service

If a lot of noise was in Lorri Hewett's dormitory one morning last November, she's the one to blame.

She ran down the halls of Emory University's Hopkins Hall screaming "I got published!" after the news came that Holloway House in Los Angeles, CA. accepted her novel *Coming of Age* for release this summer.

The achievement defies conventional wisdom in the publishing industry.

First of all, college students don't get novels published — that's for seasoned writers, whose roads to success are paved by rejection slips.

Secondly, Hewett didn't have an agent; she sent her manuscript by mail. Editors at some publishing houses won't talk to authors who don't have an agent.

And thirdly, Hewett's novel was accepted by the first company she contacted. Often agented manuscripts get passed from one publishing house to another for a year before one says yes.

So what happened here? "Perseverance and luck," 18-year-old Hewett, a sophomore said.

Hewett is no naive literary romantic. She learned the ropes by pounding out two other books. The first was a 100-pager on pioneers in the 1800s, which she wrote at age 9.

"I had just finished reading 'Little House on the Prairie,' and wanted to write something just like it," she said.

At 15, she wrote a novel about high school racism and submitted it in pursuit of the Delacorte First Young Adult Novel Prize. Her book didn't win, but the editors were encouraging.

"They wrote me and said they thought I had a real future in writing," Hewett said.

Not everything the editors said was complimentary. "They said I had a lot of stylistic problems," she said. Hewett remembered she didn't even know what style was, but she was going to find out. So she found a copy of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*.

By her last year at Chatfield High School in Littleton, CO, she was ready to give novel writing another try.

"I was in the second semester of my senior year," she said. "I was just sitting around waiting for my life to begin, so I thought I'd write a book about people at this point in their lives."

She wrote the first draft of *Coming of Age* in long-hand in six weeks. Then she revised it on her computer.

The book's three characters are all black high school seniors at crossroads in their lives. She writes of teens who don't know whether to embrace their African-American identities to the exclusion of all else or to reject their heritage altogether. "Identity," Hewett said, "is the theme that runs throughout the book."

Hewett, whose middle-class parents brought her up in a predominantly white suburb, has things in common with each character, she said.

"There are times I felt I didn't know how to fit in. I wanted to write about young blacks who were going through what I was going through," she said.

Media images stereotyping African-American teens as drug dealers or young mothers frustrate Hewett. So does any brand of Afro-centrism sacrificing individual uniqueness for strict unity.

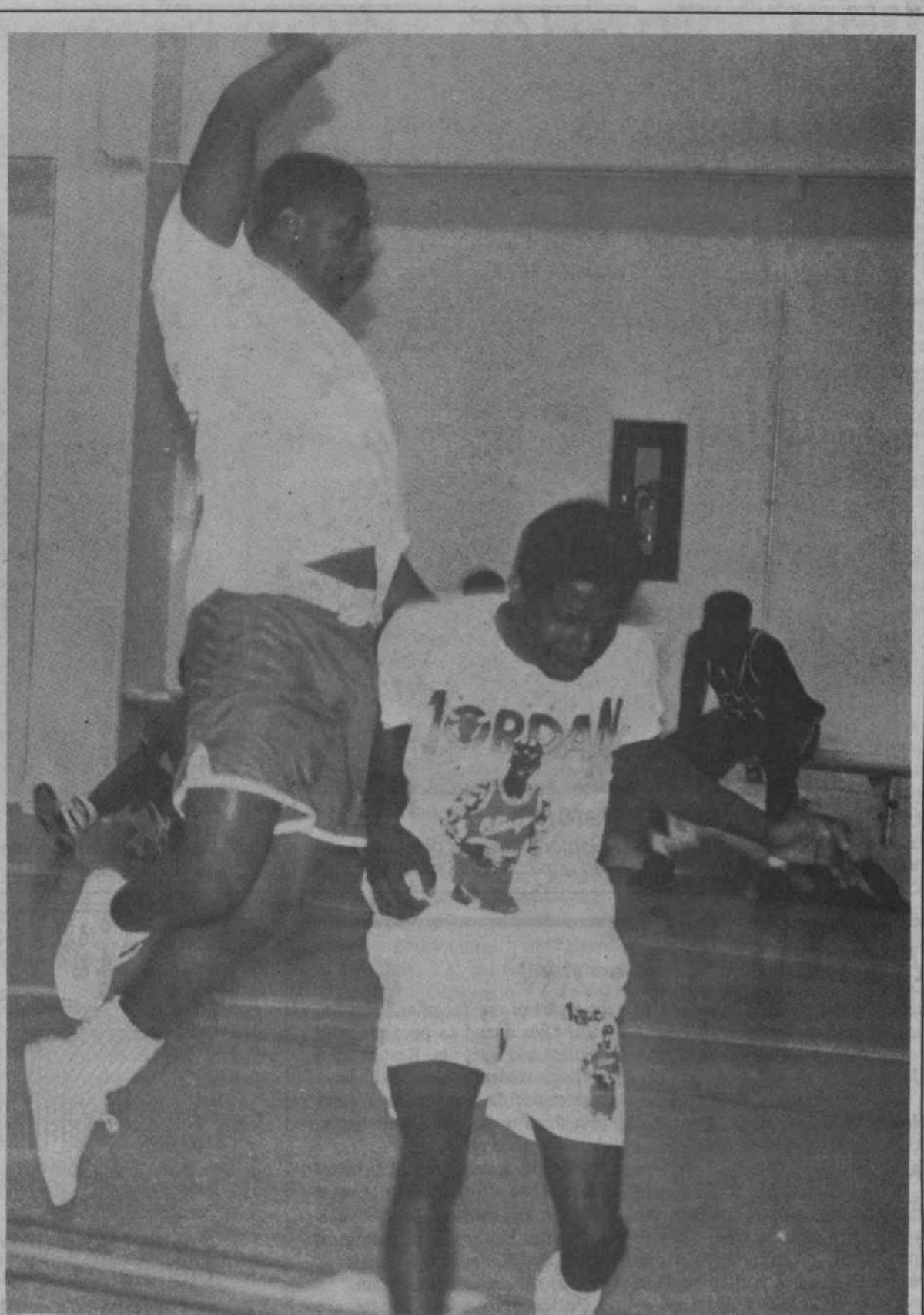
"There isn't one single black identity," she said. "For every black person in the country, there's a different black experience."

Now that Hewett is at Emory, she might write about the college experience. She is working on another book but didn't comment about it.

Hewett still sees herself more as a student than a writer. She doesn't have any illusions of fleeing Emory, sans diploma, for the writing life.

"Unrealistic," she said. The day she received the advance copies of her book in the mail, she "was excited for about an hour."

Then she put the books back in their box and returned to her course work.



Greg Rickabaugh/The Gamecock

Blocked!

Tony Goodwin (left) and Melvin Minson (right) play a rugged game of basketball Tuesday afternoon. Goodwin looks like he intimidated his opponent.

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