

WORK & Wealth



URBAN LITERATI

In less than five years Vickie M. Stringer transformed herself from a low-wage former felon into publishing's "Queen of Hip-hop Lit." As a college student in 1986 in Columbus, Ohio, she fell in love with a drug dealer and traded school for the "street game." When the relationship soured, she began dealing on her own. Her payoff: seven years in prison for drug trafficking. "At the sentencing, my attorney gave me a journal and urged me to write my story," she recalls. "I wrote *Let That Be the Reason* during my last six weeks at Bryan federal prison in Texas." When she was released in January 2001, she sent her manuscript to dozens of publishers. They all rejected it, so she published it herself. Today Stringer is founder and CEO of Columbus-based Triple Crown Publications (triplecrownpublications.com), a fast-growing publishing house specializing in gritty, cautionary tales of inner-city life. She has taken the company from a one-woman operation to nine full-time employees (some were previously incarcerated), with revenues approaching seven figures and a major deal with a foreign publisher.

MAKING THE DREAM REAL: "Friends and family helped me scrape together \$5,000 to print 1,500 copies of *Let That Be the*

Vickie M. Stringer
Triple Crown Publications

Reason. The first week I sold a thousand books for \$10 each from my car trunk, at gas stations and in beauty salons. When a small New York publisher gave me a \$25,000 advance to rerelease it, I used the money to start the business—in my kitchen."

GETTING PAID: "We publish 12 to 15 titles a year, and I'm also an agent. I've negotiated nine deals for my authors with major publishing houses like Random House and St. Martin's Press. One of the most lucrative paid a \$265,000 advance. Triple Crown collects 15 percent of all advances and royalties. We assist with promotion, marketing and distribution of more than a million books to stores like Borders and Barnes & Noble, and to libraries throughout the United States and abroad."

GOING GLOBAL: "This year I signed with the Japanese publisher Aoyama to translate *Let That Be the Reason* and ten other Triple Crown titles into Japanese. There's also interest in turning the book into a film."

SEIZING OPPORTUNITY: "When life throws you a curve, don't let the story end there. Press on. Ask God for what you want, and remember that as long as you live, you have an opportunity to change your circumstances." —SHERRI MCGEE MCCOVEY >

how i did it