

Play written by Gainesville High NJROTC instructor chosen for theatre festival

Kimberley Mullins' students in the Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Gainesville High School know of her military background—twenty years of honorable service in the U.S. Navy and 13 years teaching young people interested in naval careers.

But most don't know about her other career—as a poet, author and, more recently, a playwright.

“A few know about my writing background, and I've had students tell me they've read one of my books,” said Mullins. “But mostly I try to keep it undercover.”

That's going to be harder to do now that her play *Single Black Female in the Navy* has been accepted into the Tampa Bay Theatre Festival. It's one of seven short plays chosen for the festival out of hundreds submitted. The play will be performed at the Hillsborough Community College Theatre on September 2.

Mullins describes the play as a coming-of-age story of a young Black woman who serves in the Navy and ultimately finds love.

“You don't see many plays or movies about women in the military, and definitely not women of color,” she said. “I wanted them to see themselves in this play.”

She says she was surprised when she learned the play had been selected.

“All writers get rejection letters, so when I saw the first email saying they hadn't made a decision yet, I thought that's what was coming,” she said. “Then when I got another email saying it was accepted, I did a happy dance.”

All the selected playwrights are required to stage their entries. Mullins didn't have to go too far to find a director. GHS' theater director Natalia Pegg has volunteered her services, and she and Mullins are traveling to Tampa every weekend to work with the actors and get the play ready for the big night.

Of course, putting on a play does take resources. The Acrosstown Repertory Theatre will be hosting a showcase/fundraiser on August 19 at 3 p.m. ART previously hosted a reading of Mullins' work.

Mullins says she started writing poetry while serving in the Navy. Her first piece, *My One Last Cent*, was published in the literary journal *Amistad* in 2007. Since then she has self-published a book of poetry called *Thinking Aloud: Dimensions of Free Verse*, and several fiction novels, including *In the Company of Strangers*, *Murder: Another Name for Revenge* and *7475 Samona Drive*.

“I'm not really very outspoken, so writing is my way to speak out to the world, to express myself,” she said. “It's how I get my message across.”

And what is that message?

“That you should speak up for yourself, be independent, and that you can overcome adversity,” said Mullins. “And maybe you'll find love along the way.”