

Stephen Jerome Matthews was born to missionary parents in Luiana, Angola in 1968. At age ten, he and his older sister, Stacey were sent to live with their maternal grandmother in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania after the U.S. and South African backed National Front swept through the villages in outlying parts of Luiana. His parents were never heard from again. As a youth, Matthews had developed a love for cooking and baking. At the age of thirteen, with the help of his aunt, wrote a cookbook, "Cooking With Grandma." It has never been indicated whether that experience stoked his desire to write; for he did not write anything of note until his early twenties. Matthews' sister had said, in 2004, that he was always "haunted by [his] parents' disappearance..." Matthews' uncle had buy him a dog for a pet, but Matthews quickly released the dog in the woods. When asked why he had done so, in one of his only interviews in 2004, he explained: "I didn't want to hold anything captive, for any reason; it wouldn't matter if that dog or person or thing was compliant or not...I refused to be a keeper." He also suffered an early tragedy when he witnessed his older cousin, Curtis, die at the hands of police. The author had been quoted as saying, "I remember thinking that the police would never hit Curtis; he played for the state championship basketball team, he was a star...like killing 'Black Jesus' himself..." He battled bouts of depression and had minor brushes with the law as a teen. In spite of this, he finished high school - showing himself to be an exceptional student, as well as a gifted athlete - and he was later allowed entrance into the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. There, he was a standout football player and track star. He declined offers from the National Football League, and went forward with a military career instead. As a lieutenant, he applied for and earned a placement, and later command, in the elite Navy SEALs, commando unit. He became a "star" in the special operations community, and was reported to be tasked with "some of the most outlandish and daring of missions." Although, much of his service record is still classified, he received a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. While acting as a "senior military advisor" in Kigali, Rwanda, and for reasons never divulged, Matthews refused to obey the orders of an Italian U.N. commander. Matthews was, soon after, disciplined. But, he received his most severe punishment - short of court martial - when he was removed from active duty after his commentaries criticizing the U.S. for leaving civilians open to attack in Rwanda appeared in The New York Times. The commentaries pointed "to a foreign policy...displaying the inherent[ly] racist aspects of America's political D.N.A..." (It is in these commentaries that the author's

use of vibrant language and populist themes are first put on display.) He credited the teachings of Noam Chomsky and the writings of Chinua Achebe as "revealing to him the true purpose of a soldier." Receiving a dishonorable discharge, he returned to his home in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, where he began writing articles and letters and giving public talks critical of the United States' involvement and backing of repressive regimes and dictatorships throughout the world. With the help of his sister and brother-in-law, he opened a small restaurant in Mansfield, Pennsylvania. In the early part of 1993, he met and later married Vanessa Cobb. Several months later, his new wife was found dead in the wreckage of their vehicle, ten miles from their cottage home. In spite of it having all the appearances of a tragic accident, Matthews was arrested, tried and convicted for the death of his wife. Many critics have charged that it was nothing more than a government vendetta; attacking Matthews for his opposition to U.S. foreign policy. Matthews himself, however, never made such claims.

While in prison, he penned some notable works, and was first recognized for his skill as a serious writer when he submitted a piece for a contest: "Where Do We Go From There?" It was a short play, with dynamic dialogue and sharp characters. It won several awards and high praise from literary critics. But, the author never accepted any awards. In 2003, he wrote "Lungs Tight," a novel about "... mass incarceration [as] an inevitable consequence of capitalism and white supremacy..." It was the first of eight novels focusing on the prison-industrial complex, prison-abuse and political disenfranchisement. His eighth and final novel, "Curtis' Strangest Wedding," won him the Chicago Sun-Times Book of the Year Award. It was, in the words of Howard Lippman, " a strange, futuristic, unnatural novel...that was so much like the world we live in; it is amazing that we all aren't maddened by reading this..." The award was given posthumously; Matthews died of a drug overdose in Green Haven Correctional Facility in 2018, two months before his scheduled parole hearing.