

Darker Shade of Blue brings Merith's story to life on big screen

In his memoir, 'A Darker Shade of Blue', retired York Regional Police Inspector Keith Merith didn't hold back on some of the more troubling challenges he faced as one of the few Black officers on the force.

His unflinching look at experience with racism from both inside and outside policing, and efforts to bring about a change in culture within kick-started important community conversations when it was first published in 2024 and it's set to do so again as the subject of a new documentary, which will make its Aurora debut next Wednesday, May 27, at Cineplex Aurora.

The screening will begin at 6.30 p.m. and will be followed by a chance to meet the cast and crew.

The documentary, 'A Darker Shade of Blue: 30 Years Behind the Badge' is billed as a 'powerful' look at 'truth, justice, and resilience inside law enforcement. Directed and produced by Irina Volkova and Markham's ECG (Ethnic Channels Group) Productions, it combines on-camera interviews, firsthand accounts, and re-enactment to bring Merith's story to life, showing 'the emotional and institutional challenges faced by officers of colour, while exploring themes of courage, integrity, and reform.'

'At its heart, A Darker Shade of Blue is not only a story about policing it is a story about perseverance,' say producers. 'The documentary examines systemic barriers within institutions, the personal cost of speaking out, and the power of community alliances forged in the face of adversity'. The film blends personal testimony with historical context, shedding light on decades of cultural change within law enforcement. The result is a deeply human portrait of one man's commitment to justice both on the streets and within the system itself.'

Reflecting on the journey from book to screen, Merith tells The Auroran says he's 'hoping for good things' as his story reaches new audiences.

'The documentary walks them down a path; it takes them on a journey with me from the beginnings of joining a police department, from the internal workings of a police department, being a member of the service and being Black,' he says. 'It brings them into that dimension I'm sure most of them have never experienced before.'

The message at the core of both the book and the documentary, he adds, is 'we all can do better.'

'There's really no reason for treating people the way people have been treated. Even though you see on the outside a police service that is supposed to be looking after their citizens, what's really happening? What's their thought process? How are they delivering that service? Is it in the best way? Well, not so much. I ask a lot of questions, I get little answers from the organization. There's a lot of lip service, and I'm not just talking about my service, I'm talking right across the country and Canadian policing because that's what I deal with specifically. It's an awareness for the general public there's a lot of work to be done in holding people accountable for their behaviour.'

Since he began sharing his story, Merith says he's had 'outstanding, phenomenal' feedback from officers who served with him, including 'tough, hard cops I worked with who told me they were shaken by the stories I told.'

'Some of them didn't know what was going on. Some of them knew what was going on and did nothing about it. Some of them were complicit, and they were very raw with me when they reached out,' he says. 'A number of them were in tears when I was talking to them. They didn't realize how much it affected me and others like me, their behavior. That to me was so gratifying. I didn't expect that reaction from cops. I really didn't. I know the community would join in with me, the changemakers and people that want to know what's going on. I knew that would happen. But the coppers? That threw me off. That really did.'

By Brock Weir
Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter