



# SNOOP SPEAKS

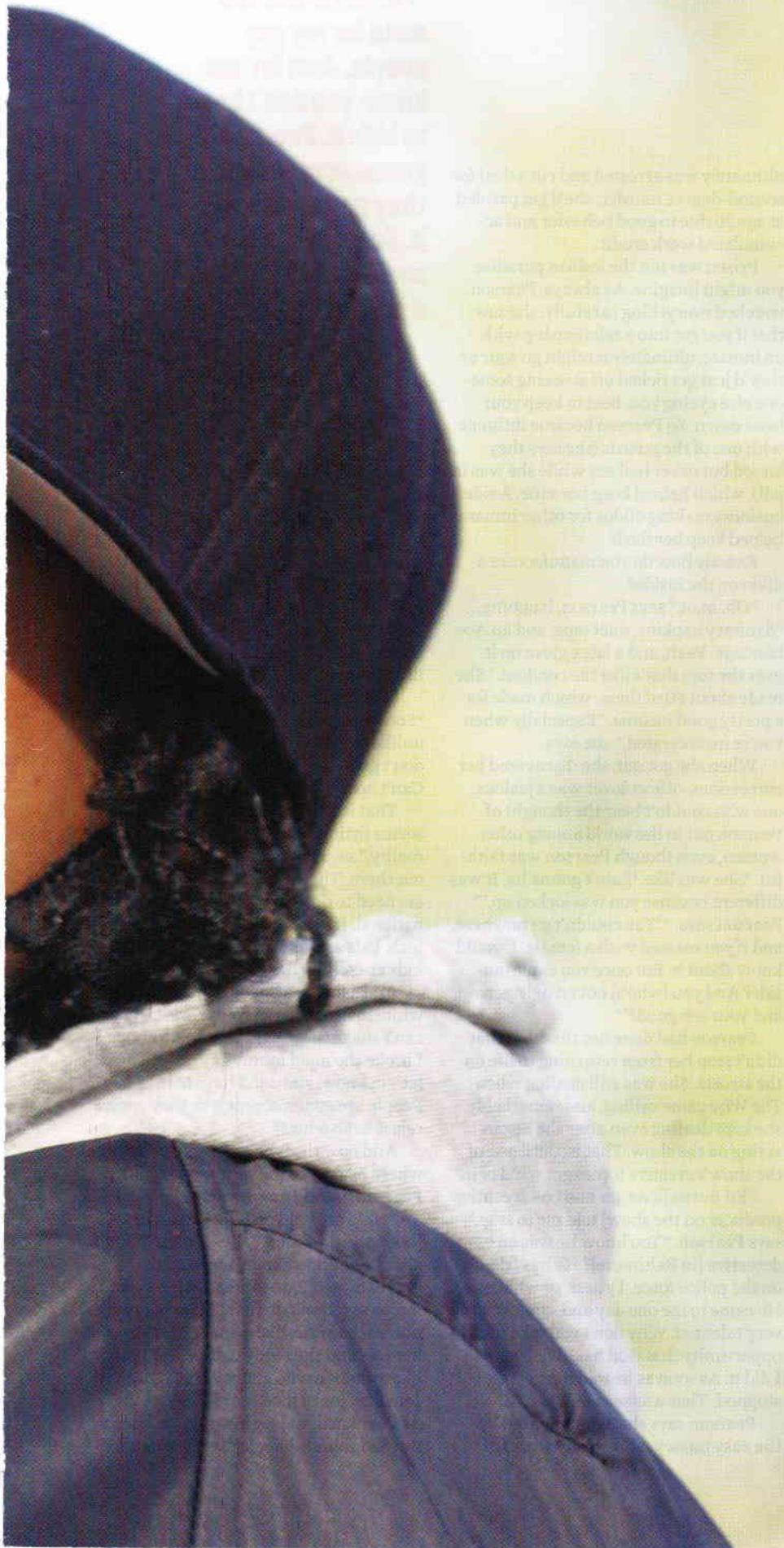
IN THE MIDST OF THE FIFTH AND FINAL SEASON OF *THE WIRE*, FELICIA “SNOOP” PEARSON TALKS ABOUT LIFE ON SET, DEALING DRUGS, DATING “MISS FINE”...OH, AND THAT MURDER RAP



BY MICHAEL GILTZ

**STREET SMART**  
Art really imitates life for *The Wire*'s Felicia “Snoop” Pearson.





**HBO'S COP DRAMA** *The Wire* has quietly evolved since 2002 from being one of the best shows on TV to being one of the best shows of all time. At the heart of the series about life in gritty Baltimore are vivid, wonderfully matter-of-fact gay characters, especially Detective Kima Greggs (Sonja Sohn), who's just one of the boys—staying out late, drinking, and coming home to a personal life just as messy and screwed up as those of her coworkers—and Omar Little (Michael K. Williams), one of the greatest bad guys ever, as an openly gay gangster who strikes fear into anyone, cop or thug, who crosses his path.

But to lesbian actress Felicia “Snoop” Pearson, *The Wire* is more than just a footnote in gay television history—it's life-changing.

Growing up rough on the streets of Baltimore, Pearson—whose character “Snoop” was named after her—was working as a drug dealer when *Wire* actor Michael K. Williams spotted her in a club and introduced her to the team behind the show.

“That was something from God,” says the 27-year-old about meeting Williams. In her memoir, *Grace After Midnight*, Pearson recounts that fateful encounter as well as her tumultuous life with a crack-addict mother, being lesbian in the hood, going to prison for killing a woman, and finding grace in jail after feeling the presence of a mentor-drug dealer who had just been killed.

Pearson now plays a colorful small role as a soldier for drug lord Marlo Stanfield (the quietly lethal Jamie Hector). “She’s a killer, and they done taught her,” says Pearson. “They taught her very well.”

Pearson's character kicked off season 4 by going to a Home Depot-type hardware store and buying the biggest, baddest nail gun in the place, handing a roll of money to the employee who helped her find it and telling him to keep the change. (That nail gun would play a murderous role in the season.) This year, true to type, Pearson early on is seen waiting in a car to get the drop on some people who need to die. When a protégé sitting in the backseat talks about driving by and spraying the crowd with bullets, Pearson rolls her eyes dismissively and growls in her distinctive mellow voice, “In B-more we just point and shoot.” And then she shoots a guy in the head as he's running away.

As a little kid, Pearson knew she liked girls; she fell for Smurfette on the popular cartoon show *The Smurfs*. If Pearson hadn't been so tough (she'd punch →

any boy who dissed her and always hung with the guys), that might have been a problem. "Everybody I came into encounter with was very understanding," says Pearson. "Everything about me, they just got to accept it. I think it's wrong for people to judge people because of their sexuality. It's just sex. Sex don't make a person. It's their heart and everything around them that makes a person."

One of her mentors had insisted the young Felicia was just confused. When she was 12 years old he set her up with a woman Pearson calls "Miss Fine," who was probably age 19 or 20. He figured Pearson wouldn't actually enjoy it. He was wrong.

"I liked it," she says. "I went back over there."

**O**NE OF THE IRONIES of *Grace After Midnight* is that Pearson was constantly being guided away from a life of crime by the drug dealers and hardened criminals who employed her. The man she calls "Uncle" gave Snoop her nickname (after Snoop from "Peanuts," because he thought she looked "sweet but sad"). She was good at school but even better at the streets, studying every car, every cop, every customer, always paying attention. Her biological mother was a crack addict who rarely tried to contact Pearson. (The second time Pearson met her, at about age 4, her mother forced her to strip off the Sunday dress she was wearing so she could pawn it for drug money.) Loving elderly parents eventually adopted Pearson, but they couldn't keep her off the streets.

A month before Pearson turned 15, she was walking down the street when a fight caught her eye. She joined the crowd watching, and one of the people involved—Pearson says she had never seen her before—grabbed an aluminum baseball bat and zeroed in on Pearson. Pearson says she screamed at the woman to stop but couldn't break away because of the crowd, so she showed her gun. When the woman kept coming, Pearson says, she was certain she'd be dead unless she acted first. She shot and killed the woman, then went into hiding. Pearson

ultimately was arrested and cut a deal for second-degree murder; she'd get paroled at age 20 due to good behavior and accumulated work credit.

Prison was not the lesbian paradise you might imagine. As always, Pearson watched everything carefully; she saw that if you got into a relationship with an inmate, ultimately it might go sour or they'd just get ticked off at seeing someone else eyeing you. Best to keep your head down. So Pearson became intimate with one of the guards (she says they kissed but never had sex while she was in jail), which helped keep her sane. A side business making dildos for other inmates helped keep her flush.

Exactly how do you manufacture a dildo on the inside?

"Oh, man," says Pearson, laughing. "Sanitary napkins, duct tape, and an Ace bandage. Yeah, and a latex glove on it over the top; that's like the condom." She made about 50 of them, which made for a pretty good income. "Especially when you're incarcerated," she says.

When she got out, she discovered her corrections-officer lover was a jealous one who couldn't bear the thought of Pearson out in the world among other women, even though Pearson was faithful. "She was like, 'I ain't gonna lie. It was different because you was locked up,'" Pearson says. "You couldn't go nowhere, and if you messed with a female, I would know about it. But once you came outside? And you [who's] not an ugly person, and your sex good?"

Pearson had done her time, but that didn't stop her from returning to life on the streets. She was still dealing when *The Wire* came calling, and remarkably, she kept dealing even after she began acting on the show. That is, until one of the show's creative forces got wind of it.

"Ed Burns [a writer and co-executive producer on the show] told me to stop," says Pearson. "You know he was an ex-detective [in Baltimore]? He has friends on the police force, I guess, or whatever. He came to me one day and said, 'You're very talented. Why don't you take this opportunity that God has given you?' I did it. As soon as he told me to stop, I stopped. That was season 3."

Pearson says she's not tempted by the easy money (and steady work) of

**"I hope I broke the mold for my gay people. Just let 'em know; you don't have to hide it. People are gonna accept it or they gonna reject it. So what? It's just sex. Sex don't make a person."**

dealing, though the writers strike is making her stir crazy. She's working now on turning her memoir into a feature film in which she'd play herself, like Eminem in *8 Mile*.

"I want the big screen," says Pearson. "Something like *Antwone Fisher*." But unlike the real-life Fisher, she notes, "I don't go to the Navy—I go to *The Wire*. Can't nobody play me but me."

That it all started with *The Wire* seems fitting. "On *The Wire* they give you reality," says Pearson. "They just put it out there. They do something other writers need to do. Everything on the show is national. It's not just Baltimore. A lot of little kids are getting teased. A lot of little kids are selling drugs."

And a lot of gay people are not just white males living in New York. "Oh, you can't shake that," says Pearson. "I hope I broke the mold for my gay people. Just let 'em know; you don't have to hide it. People are gonna accept it or they gonna reject it. So what?"

And now that she's recognized everywhere by fans of the series, is the single Pearson finding new love?

"Hold on, hold on. I like bourgeois [bourgeois] women," she laughs. "I don't not like ghetto women, because I'm ghetto myself. I need someone to tame me, to say 'Don't do that.' I like bourgeois—not *real* bourgeois, like somebody step on her feet and she ready to cry—but I just like a woman who got her own job...personality...looks nice...got all her teeth." As Pearson dissolves into giggles, Sweet But Sad sounds happier every minute. ♣