

Which major stars are slotted to return to 'SHIELD'?

Actress Taylor King ponders on Season 4 'The Wire,' secret cast crush, Baltimore



Photo courtesy of Taylor King



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The women on "The Wire" were anything but weak, and one of the most rebellious ones came in the form of a 14-year-old girl's body. Actress Taylor King played the role of Zenobia Dawson in "Season 4."

Howard "Bunny" Colvin (played by actor Robert Wisdom) divided the students into "corner boys" and "stoop kids." Zenobia was one of the few girls who was put into the "corner boys" category. She could hang with the fellas, but her father-daughter type relationship with Bunny showed there was some potential in her to be a better student.

In this interview with **The Wire Examiner**, 22-year-old King talks about why she originally didn't want to be in "The Wire," who her secret cast crush was, her infatuation with actor-rapper Will Smith, what it was really like in her hometown of Baltimore and her appreciation

of fatherhood.

Shamontiel Vaughn: Were you aware of how big a deal "The Wire" was at the time you came on? I know you came in Season 4 [after] people were hyperventilating after Stringer Bell was killed. But were you ready for the impact of Season 4?

Taylor King: Oh my gawd, of course not. I'm not going to lie. I was not a big "Wire" fan. Growing up in Baltimore, we all root for our home team, but for me, I was like, "It's overrated. We don't really act like that. We don't do that." At the time I didn't know how much "The Wire" was true for our city. It didn't take until years later that I understood the bigger impact it had on television itself, the ratings and the storyline. I think "The Wire" was a little bit before its time.

SV: Did it make you look at your own hometown a little different? As with any neighborhood, you have the "good" neighborhoods and you have the "bad" neighborhoods. Then you have the richer neighborhoods and the poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Did the show make it seem uglier than usual?

TK: No, not at all. If anything I think they watered it down. I grew up in Baltimore city, born and raised here. I spent majority of my life in Baltimore public schools. And that whole school thing was watered down. It wasn't until I moved out of Baltimore that I started having culture shock. Oh, there's different people. There's not just black people in America. They're not just on television. If anyone was to come here in the poverty side of the city and see what's really going on, people would say, "This is 'The Wire.'" Baltimore does have other venues and other areas, but the focus was on the grit and the grime. You can expect to see that today. I don't think stuff has changed much unfortunately for us.

SV: What did you think was watered down? It sounds like "The Wire" was a mirror image of . . .

TK: I said "watered down" because from still being here and still living here, I've seen and heard some things that would probably blow people away. There were people like Bodie [played by J.D. Williams], and I liked those guys. They were, to me, growing up in the city, you looked up to those guys because they had the money. You don't know what comes with that. The same as a blue collar guy that goes to work everyday. All you see is his nice car, but you don't know what he does at work. [The show] was a big eye opener. I was 14 or 15.

It's so much harsher than what the TV portrays. You can only show people so much of what's going on. I had hoped "The Wire" would still be playing. "Family Guy" has been on for years. I was hoping we could get that same kind of revenue for "The Wire." I think it deserved it.

SV: David Simon did an interview with [New York Magazine's TV critic Ken Tucker at the The Museum of Television & Radio], and he said the show was written for five seasons. It sounds like you thought he should've rethought that idea.

TK: Oh yeah, definitely.

SV: Did you come across a lot of people who felt the same way?

TK: Of course. Even if he took a break and came back and did something else, I think that would've been good.

SV: All right, let's focus in on you. Because you weren't a fan of "The Wire" before, how did you come about getting the part? Did you want to be an actress already?

TK: Yes, I've always wanted to be an actress since I was a little girl. People would probably have imaginary friends. I was busy acting scenes out from "What's Love Got to Do With It?" I can remember trying to act like that little girl who was in the movie that played Tina Turner. Anyway, this company that is nonprofit called **WombWorks Production**, they were supposed to do work on "The Wire." I was with them doing theater. I had never thought about film, but I'm not a good theater actress. I get stage fright really bad. Film kinda worked out for me because someone could say "Cut" and just do it again. They met with Pat Moran, and I was picked out of a couple of opportunities. The funny thing about it was I did not want to go. I don't know why I was so anti-"Wire." My father forced me to go to the audition. I didn't want to go. I was having a bad day. The rest is history. I already had an attitude so that's all they needed.

SV: Definitely! If you walked in acting exactly like Zenobia it was a given. After you auditioned, what made you decide to be on the show? Did someone force you into that, too?

TK: After I calmed down and got myself together, I realized, "This is big." The audition

wasn't for Zenobia. It was just to be an extra. I don't think Zenobia's role was just yet taken. I can't remember which producer it was, but when I was doing one of the extra scenes, they called me in and asked, "Can you read a few lines?" I was like, "Yeah sure."

SV: For the girls in the classroom, you were the one that stuck around the longest.

TK: Right. I don't know why that was. If I could have it my way, "The Wire" would've been a one-woman show by me. [Laughs] I would've played every part. I could've been Snoop's [played by Felicia Pearson] best friend, her love interest, anything. One regret I do have is I do not network. I came in. I read lines. And I left. I regret that so much because the woman that I am today is not the 14- and 15-year-old back then.

SV: Teenagers tend to look at the moment instead of the entire experience. But one thing teenagers do well is crush.

TK: [Bursts into laughter]

SV: I know you came after Michael B. Jordan [who played Wallace] died off from the show. But you worked with a pretty good amount of guys on a regular basis. In [August 2013 edition of] "Essence" magazine, they explored "40 Years of Fine." [Two of "The Wire" actors included were] Michael B. Jordan, and the other one was Maestro Harrell [who played Randy Wagstaff].

TK: Yesss!

SV: Were there any crushes on set because you were the only girl who hung around?

TK: They had no idea how much I was drooling over them. People would say, "Oh, you had a crush on Julito [who played Namond Brice]. No. I always go for the person that no one else liked. My biggest crush was **Jermaine Crawford [who played Duquan "Dukie" Weems]**. And to this day he has no idea. Maybe he'll know after this interview.

SV: I have to point out that although his name was "Dukie" on the show, Jermaine Crawford grew up to be incredibly handsome.

TK: Yes. He is so cute and chocolate. And my other crush of course was Tristan [who

played Michael Lee].

SV: Tristan Wilds. Mack Wilds. Do you like his new song?

TK: Of course! I like anything he does.

SV: [Laughs] So you're a true supporter. Okay, so you and Maestro, that wasn't a thing?

TK: No, we were really cool. We weren't even thinking about that kind of thing. It was a second little family for us. We had bonded on brotherly and sisterly love. I tried to keep it that way. But deep inside those two boys [Tristan Wilds and Jermaine Crawford], oh my gosh! [Laughs]

SV: So from their perspective you were just like one of the guys?

TK: Yep!

SV: That's a smart business move. You don't want to complicate things onset. It's interesting that you went for the two guys you worked with the least.

TK: Right. Exactly. The other one was Davon [who played Darnell Tyson] who was in the class. We were in the car for the restaurant scene.

SV: He's the one who didn't want to take his coat off in the restaurant. Yeah, I remember him.

TK: He was older. He's a fine specimen, too!

SV: How much older was he than you at the time?

TK: He was probably about 17, 18 or 19. Him and Na'Dria Jennings [who played Chandra Porter]. She was older than a middle school person. Me and her were like best friends during the show. We would meet up and laugh. I remember the day that she had to slap me. She was like, "Do you know I get to slap you today?" I was like, "Yeah, I read that."

SV: Did she really hit you?

TK: No, she didn't. That's a question everybody wants to know. We had a company working with us in the back. These two guys showed us how to fake it so it looks real. It was fun. It was really cool.

SV: Excluding the guys who were teenagers, who was your favorite person to work with?

TK: Dr. Chewey who passed away. He was the classroom's mentor. He gave me some beautiful pointers at the times I needed him. He was such a beautiful person, and he was so humble. And Na'Dria. And also Colvin [Wisdom] was really cool. He brought his family in one day, and I thought that was really cool. My father didn't do stuff like that. When he brought his son I thought that was beautiful. Even then I recognized that was a symbol of love.

SV: So Robert Wisdom really was Bunny Colvin when it came to family?

TK: Definitely. I'll remember that for the rest of my life because I associated that notion that he gave as a symbol of what a father can and should do. It was one of those epiphany moments for me when he brought his family there a couple of times. He was African-American. He was a male. To me, it was like "Wow!"

SV: Really?

TK: That's not something that happens every day, especially back in 2003 or 2004.

SV: Not with anybody around you? Father just not there?

TK: My father was in my life. My father figured that family was second. His work was first. My father took me to his shows. My father is actually a professional comedian.

SV: Do we know him?

TK: He does "**Kiss My Bumper.**" That's what he's most known for. His name is Howard Gaskins. He took me to his shows. We had our ups and downs. Over the course of time we've mended ourselves. But when Colvin brought his family in and introduced his children to us, it was one of those things that really hit me. It was a special moment in my mind.

SV: Okay, so you found some new male role models from "The Wire" on the set?

TK: Yes. Right.

SV: I know these shows might be before your time since you're 22, but there used to be shows like "Wonder Years" and "Blossom" and "Boy Meets World." Those were softer shows. And we hadn't seen a show with a primarily African-American cast doing a show where there were school scenes with darker scenes as well as lighter scenes since "A Different World." Of course "A Different World" was geared towards the college scene, but in other shows, if you got one black person [on the show], you got one. And if there was more than one, then the second one was a replacement.

TK: The token black girl in the classroom? Yeah. I can tell you this. "The Wire" is a breathtaking moment now, but it wasn't while I was doing the show. I wasn't aware of it, but I can honestly say that that statement is true. Growing up in Baltimore city back when I was a little girl, there was this one college called the **MICA Institute**. A couple of art students came to my school. They were predominantly white people, and we did art and music classes. I'd never had a white woman or a white man take my hand and hold it or play with me. For me, that was so real. You might say, "That's weird." But it's a true statement. I didn't have any white friends until I went to Florida in middle school. If a show was made just based off of an inner-city school system, that would be probably entertaining because you would actually see a lot of stuff that you don't think this generation coming up has to work through. These are our future groundbreakers, our Steven Spielbergs and our Tyler Perrys. Our Oprahs are being born now. Back then Oprah didn't have camera crews following them or shows about what they were going through.

SV: Do you feel like reality shows are a better choice than written sitcoms? Or, do you feel like written sitcoms do a better job of exploring real issues than reality shows do?

TK: It depends. Once you're in front of a camera and you mention 10 million people are watching, you're going to act just a little bit different. You get that camera in your face, and I'm not going to be the same Taylor. I'd stick with a writer observing and then saying what happens next. That writer has nothing to hide, nothing to lie about.

SV: Do you feel like the school system that was explored was actually the school

system that you dealt with in Baltimore?

TK: I will use the words "watered down" for this. I remember a couple of my friends had gotten ahold of the gym lockers' locks and we decided to throw them at the teachers. There was this one particular teacher we didn't like because he was from Africa, and he had an accent. We targeted him. Stuff like that happened every day. Not so much now. I think they shut it down and it re-opened. But they have security. Can you imagine going to a school and seeing an officer walk around every couple of minutes? You got metal detectors and stuff like that. It's not a bad thing, but it's not a good thing. We're already being institutionalized. To have an officer walk around the hallways just to make sure you're okay. It's security for the teachers and other students.

SV: But you just said the thing about throwing locks at a teacher. Do you feel like it's justified to do that?

TK: No. The other part of that is we didn't have recreational centers. We had to make our own fun. You leave that to a grip of younguns that have families who only know what's around them. Things are going to happen. You left me to play by myself. There weren't any volunteers. We had to make our own fun.

SV: Okay, you didn't have a Prez? [This is in reference to Detective Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski played by Jim True-Frost.]

TK: Right. No, we didn't.

SV: Now I'm concerned about the teacher. Do you regret that now?

TK: Oh my gosh, yes, especially knowing where that man was from and that he had a family. Number one, he was a human being who has dedicated his time. I have a lot of regrets. I was an awful little girl. I try to do the next right thing. I try to learn new stuff and talk to different people. I try to make those things right. I know I can't since it's already done, but I was horrible. Evil.

SV: What made you change? You were working on this show so that was steady income for awhile, but what made you make the transition from an "awful little girl" to who you are now?

TK: I think it was growing up. I've always claimed to be different from everyone else. I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ. Young teenagers have that closed mind. Tunnel vision. I couldn't see the bigger picture. I wanted to live in that moment. I wanted to make sure I wasn't picked on or being bullied so I did whatever I could do to fit in. I never really did. What made me change? I have a son now, but I changed before that.

SV: How old is your son?

TK: He's three. I was always paranoid. After the show was over and the money was gone, I was still in Baltimore city going to public school. Fans of "The Wire," I was attending school with them.

SV: So did that make you more popular or was it, "She thinks she's better than us"?

TK: It was a little bit of both. I was picked on a lot because I didn't dress up. I didn't have that money later on. Unfortunately if I had a financial adviser I probably would've held on to it, but I was picked on a lot and isolated just because I had done something different, which was be a part of "The Wire." I wanted a different outcome than everybody else. Everybody else was okay with working at these places and not getting higher education. My friends were okay with just finishing high school. Then they would get pregnant and be a stay-at-home mom. I don't want that. It took awhile for me to realize that.

SV: When we first got on the call, I heard you say you had to speak to a professor so obviously you're in school. What is your major now?

TK: My major is legal assistance, which is actually like paralegal work. I go to a community college. I want to do theater. I want to do acting. That's my passion. I would like to go past what my looks are. I look like I can play the troubled teen and then the person in jail, but I want to do something different. I want to play Annie. I'm too old for that now, but my dream role is to play Oprah. I want to do acting, but right now I'm doing legal assistance. I did debate in high school. I got myself into that, and I enjoyed it very much. Anything where there's a law and lawyer type I want to be a part of it.

SV: Congratulations on going to school. I'm glad you see yourself differently and were able to mature and grow up. Working in the legal world isn't easy. So let's just say in an ideal world you're working in a legal world and you're also able to act. You

get your first movie. You get the star role. You get a love interest. Do you go for one of the people in "The Wire" the way they look now all grown up or do you go outside of that to another actor that we know of?

TK: Yes! I am infatuated with Will Smith.

SV: Will Smith is very cute. He's just much, much older than you.

TK: And that's a plus. He's lived. He's done everything. He can teach me some things hopefully.

SV: With Jada right on the side.

TK: Oh yeah. Right. On the flip side, there were so many hotties on "The Wire." There wasn't an ugly guy up in there. Everybody was fine from previous seasons. I was so young and in the moment. Tristan is so hot. He's just so handsome, but I don't want to go with him. I'll just stick with Will.

SV: Well now I want to know if you had to pick a love interest from "The Wire," who would it be in your ideal movie? Now I'm curious.

TK: If I had to pick a person from "The Wire," Michael B. Jordan was fine.

SV: You didn't meet him though, right?

TK: No, but in my mind we've met many of times. [Laughs]

SV: [Laughs]

TK: Julito's pretty cute, too. He's just so typical. I'll stick with Jermaine.

SV: Hey, I can't fault you for that. All right, is there anything I haven't covered that you'd like covered before we end the interview?

TK: I've always wanted to say how grateful I am of the show, how grateful I am that it happened to come to my city. Everything happens for a reason. I'm grateful for the thought that went into picking me, and I want more opportunities for my city. Things don't have to

stay the way they are.

To contact Taylor directly, visit her on Instagram at [TaylorMay_d](#) or on Facebook under her name.

*Shamontiel is the **Scandal Examiner** and the **National African American Entertainment Examiner**, too.*

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