



**TRIBES of the HEART**  
*A literary fiction collection*

**Anger's Bitch Book Club Kit**

**By Michael C. Thompson**

# Part 1: A Note from the Author & Therapist

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the Tribes of the Heart Collection. Thank you for choosing to explore this shared Texas universe.

While these stories radiate outward from the unique and sprawling city of Houston to other key regions of the state, the soul of the collection is rooted in a distinctly Texan sense of resilience.

My professional background is in clinical therapy, focusing on trauma and generational healing, and my native Texas environment often provides the visceral atmosphere for my stories—the inescapable heat, the sprawling distances, and the specific sense of community found here. I use characters like Gib not to offer 'answers,' but to explore resilience as a raw, complicated, and uniquely human experience.

I have designed the discussion menu in this kit to encourage curiosity—about the characters, the therapeutic themes, and perhaps, about your own resilience.

I wish your group a rich, meaningful conversation.

Warmly,

Michael C. Thompson

# Part 2: Clinical Insight

A Conversation with Author & Therapist Michael C. Thompson

*(Note for the group facilitator: This exclusive Q&A provides context for Michael's approach to Anger's Bitch. Feel free to read these insights aloud to ground your group's discussion of the psychological themes.)*

## **1. The Intersection of Roles How does your background as a clinical therapist influence your fiction writing? Do you begin by outlining a psychological profile for your characters?**

I don't approach my characters like clients; I approach them, first and foremost, as human beings. I don't use diagnostic labels or write clinical profiles. However, my training allows me to listen differently—to look past surface-level behavior and ask: What is fundamentally driving this person? What story are they telling themselves about their pain?

It helps me understand the 'delicate architecture' of their motivations, their trauma responses, and how they navigate healing. When writing Anger's Bitch, my counselor background didn't tell me what happened in Gib's past, but it helped me make his reaction to that past feel visceral and authentic.

## **2. Shame versus Guilt A defining moment in the novel is when Willow clarifies the difference between shame and guilt for Gib. Why was it essential to tackle this specific psychological concept early in the series?**

This is perhaps one of the most critical therapeutic hurdles. In my experience, guilt is behavioral and often functional: it's 'I did a bad thing,' which can lead to corrective action and restitution. Shame, however, is identity-based and toxic: it is 'I am a bad thing.'

For someone like Gib, having spent decades inside a system designed to label and isolate, shame can become his identity—his new confinement. For Gib to have any hope of truly re-entering the world, he must learn to put that heavy burden of shame down. Willow, as that intuitive community connector, recognizes that he is not just processing his past actions (guilt); he is letting himself be defined by them (shame). Until he makes that shift, he cannot truly rejoin the 'tribe.' Tackling that in Book One felt vital.

## **3. Generational Healing The collection's overall description notes that "while trauma may be generational, so is healing." Where do we see the early blueprint for generational healing in Anger's Bitch?**

It is often subtle and usually communal. We frequently look for dramatic, singular acts, but generational healing often happens in the 'merry jazz' of connection. In Anger's Bitch, we see it in how Gib, despite his own profound brokenness, interacts with the 'merry band of misfits'—the younger, unconventional community around him. When an elder models resilience, even messily—when Gib chooses to finally read the 'letter' from his past instead of throwing it away unopened—he is modeling a different response than repressing pain and letting it fester. He is subtly providing a different blueprint for those younger characters witnessing his struggle.

## **4. The Setting as Metaphor Specificity is crucial to the Tribes of the Heart world. Why was it important to make Gib a Houston Uber driver specifically, rather than just a driver in any large city?**

Specificity gives the psychology ground. I needed a job for Gib that was both highly visible and completely anonymous. An Uber driver in Houston moves through every diverse neighborhood, witnesses the entire city, yet is often entirely ignored.

For someone like Gib, emerging from years of confinement, that specific job offers a temporary sanctuary: he is in the world but not fully of it yet. He has the car as a shield. It allowed me to dramatize that delicate transition—that tentative first step into community while navigating those very specific, sprawling, and sometimes isolating Houston roads.

## Part 3: Discussion Menu (15 Questions)

We recommend choosing 8–10 questions that best fit your group's dynamic.

### Section 1: Psychological & Thematic Depths (The Counselor's Lens)

1. Willow tells Gib, “Shame is a liar, Lyndon. It tells you the poison is in the man. Guilt just tells you about the act.” How do we see Gib grappling with internalized shame throughout the novel, and how does this affect his interactions with others?
2. Gib is 57, a former shadow of confinement, now navigating the sprawling modern landscape of Houston as an Uber driver. The external journey often reflects the internal one. How does his daily Houston route (the intense inner-city traffic, the diverse neighborhoods, the relative anonymity) mimic his feeling of lack of control or his 'passive' participation in the free world?
3. The theme of Kintsugi—mending brokenness with gold—is central to the collection's overall description. Based on your reading, what 'gold' has been used to repair the 'cracks' in Gib's life by the novel's end?
4. After decades of repression and isolation, the concept of a 'tribe of the heart' is terrifying for Gib. Which 'tribe'—the misfits, his neighbors, or the memory of his past—ultimately gives him the courage to step into hope?
5. Based on the therapeutic principles interwoven into the plot, do you feel Gib has truly reconciled with his past, or is he merely learning to coexist with it?
6. The collection's description says, “while trauma may be generational, so is healing.” What evidence of generational healing do we see, even in its early stages, within Anger's Bitch?

### Section 2: Narrative, Setting, & Symbolism (The Author's Craft)

7. In the novel, Gib says jazz is like life—“messy, improvisational, you have to listen hard to find the beauty in the chaos.” Which character represents 'beauty in the chaos' most clearly for Gib?
8. Gib has a distinct internal voice as he navigates the free world for the first time in decades. How does the author balance this internal monologue with Gib's spoken dialogue to create a cohesive sense of character?
9. How does the visceral atmosphere of the shared universe (the specific local Houston culture, the inescapable heat, the vast distances) contribute to the mood and the overarching themes of the story?
10. The supporting characters—the 'merry band of misfits'—act as catalysts for Gib. Did you find one misfit's story particularly compelling or challenging? Why?

11. Pacing is key in literary fiction. After Gib has been institutionalized for so long, how does the author use narrative pacing (speeding up or slowing down certain moments) to mimic Gib's experience of 're-entry'?
12. Symbolism plays a large role. Consider other recurring motifs—the car, the heat, specific locations—and how they deepen the narrative.

### Section 3: Character Choices & Collection Impact

13. If you could give Gib one piece of advice at the beginning of the book, what would it be, and would he have listened?
14. The Tribes of the Heart collection utilizes a narrative technique where the shared universe, centered in Houston, radiates outward to other distinct Texas locations (such as Gatesville or East Texas). How does expanding the geographic scope beyond the core Houston community enhance your understanding of the collection's main themes—that trauma and healing can ripple across vast distances?
15. This series is described as "unapologetically hopeful." Does the ending of Anger's Bitch earn that label, or does it feel more ambiguous?

## Part 4: Immersion: Gib's Rideshare Jazz Playlist

Playlist Title: Finding Beauty in the Chaos

The Concept: Gib defines jazz as being like life—"messy, improvisational, you have to listen hard to find the beauty in the chaos." This playlist is the authentic soundtrack for his daily navigation of Houston's sprawling roads. It features key artists and tracks explicitly mentioned in the novel (marked with an asterisk\*), blending structurally rich, reflective music with the soulful sound of community and the erratic energy of the Houston streets.

*(Note for the group facilitator: Put this on shuffle during your discussion, or encourage members to listen to it before reading to set the atmospheric mood.)*

Suggested Tracks:

- "Move" (from the album Birth of the Cool) – Miles Davis\* (The album is mentioned as a foundational piece of cool jazz, setting the tone for Gib's internal structure.)
- "It Never Entered My Mind" – Miles Davis Quintet\* (Mentioned explicitly in the novel. Perfect for Gib's quiet, lonely, and deeply reflective moments on the road.)
- "Take Five" – The Dave Brubeck Quartet\* (Mentioned explicitly in the novel. Complex time signatures that mirror the 'messy, improvisational' nature of life.)
- "Before I Let Go" – Frankie Beverly and Maze\* (Mentioned explicitly in the novel. The essential anthem of community, celebration, and joy—the visceral sound of the 'tribe' gathering.)
- "So What" – Miles Davis
- "Houston" – Robert Glasper
- "A Love Supreme, Pt. I – Acknowledgement" – John Coltrane
- "Strasbourg / St. Denis" – Roy Hargrove Factor

## Part 5: The Therapist's Edge: Exercise

Worksheet Title: Celebrating Your Gold

(Facilitator Note: For this exercise, provide blank paper or journals for members. Have one member read the introduction aloud before giving the group 5 minutes of quiet time to write.)

Introduction: The philosophy of Kintsugi (meaning "golden joinery") is central to the Tribes of the Heart Collection. Instead of discarding broken pottery, Japanese artists repaired the cracks with lacquer dusted with powdered gold. The philosophy asserts that the breakage and repair are essential parts of the object's history and should be illuminated, not hidden. The piece becomes more beautiful and stronger because it was broken.

Willow helps Gib begin to see his life not as a vessel that must hide its cracks, but as one capable of being mended with gold.

Your Prompt: Take 5 minutes of quiet reflection to consider a time you felt "broken" (a significant loss, a difficult transition, or a past choice that caused regret).

- Acknowledge the Break: Briefly describe the moment of breakage. What "vessel" in your life shattered?
- Identify the Gold: What strength, resilience, wisdom, compassion, or perspective did you gain specifically because of that break? This is your "gold."
- The Mend: How did this "gold" help you put yourself back together? How are you fundamentally different—and perhaps stronger or more authentic—today?

(Facilitator Note: After writing, encourage members to share only if they feel comfortable. Focus the group discussion on the gold (the resilience) rather than re-traumatizing details of the break.)