



Killing Willis: From Diff'rent Strokes to the Mean Streets to the Life I Always Wanted

Todd Bridges , Sarah Tomlinson (Contributor)

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The former child star—best known as Willis Jackson on Diff'rent Strokes—shares the shocking but inspirational details of his struggles with addiction, brushes with the law, and fierce fight to carve a path through the darkness and find his true identity.

For Todd Bridges early stardom was no protection from painful childhood events that paved the road to his own personal hell. One of the first African-American child actors on shows like Little House on the Prairie, The Waltons, and Roots, Bridges burst to the national forefront on the hit sitcom Diff'rent Strokes as the subject of the popular catchphrase, "What'chu Talkin About Willis?" When the show ended, Bridges was overwhelmed by the off-camera traumas he had faced. Turning to drugs as an escape, he soon lost control.

Now, for the first time, Bridges opens up about his life before and after Diff'rent Strokes: the incredible reversals of fortune brought on by fame and the precipitous—and very public—descent that followed; the persecution from police; the drug addiction that nearly consumed him; the criminal charges that almost earned him a life sentence; and his successful legal defense led by Johnnie Cochran. Through it all, Bridges never relented in his quest to fight his way back from the abyss, establish his own identity—separate from Willis Jackson—and offer his ordeal as a positive example for those struggling to overcome similar challenges. His triumphant story of recovery and redemption is recounted here as well.

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Killing Willis: From Diff'rent Strokes to the Mean Streets to the Life I Always Wanted Details

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From Reader Review Killing Willis: From Diff'rent Strokes to the Mean Streets to the Life I Always Wanted for online ebook

Rochonne says

Did Willis tell us everything. Not so sure. It was interesting to read about Todd Bridge's upbringing but I felt that most of the book lacked depth and substance. There is an enormous amount of events and activities chronicled here but without a real emotional center to anchor these events, they all read more like short stories than a cohesive compilation of Bridges' life journey. Most of them come off as sly bragging more so than remorseful which is what you would expect for someone who has supposedly been through hell and back.

There was a lot of detail on Mr. Bridges' relationship with drugs and the drug world. But the book glosses over his struggle back to a "normal" life. Since he is a former addict, he should have taken more time to let other people in recovery know that there is truly life after the drugs. Maybe that's his next book.

Lastly, the general writing style is exceptionally poor and non-engaging. Mr. Bridges' often sounds like he's just rambling and heading toward a general direction in his narrative. There's an excessive usage of commas in the middle of sentences and the word because is used to many times for this book to have be edited.

Yolo says

"Whatchu talkin' about Willis?" (In my Gary Coleman voice), is the first thing I said when I heard that Todd Bridges had written a book about his life. Like so many others, I loved Bridges' character, Willis Jackson on the television series, Diff'rent Strokes. It was on Diff'rent Strokes that people around the country would fall in love with Bridges and his co-star Gary Coleman as Arnold Jackson. In spite of becoming the first African-American child actor to have a recurring role on a successful television show, Bridges would face many obstacles and become the focus of many negative media campaigns.

In Bridges' book, Killing Willis, he opens up about his life pre- and post Diff'rent Strokes. After proclaiming at the age of four that he wanted to be an actor like Redd Foxx, Bridges' mom made sure he was on the right path to success. He shares his early days as his mother went over scripts for television and commercials with him serving as mom, coach and agent. Throughout the book, he shares many stories about his mother and her drive to ensure her children were successful. Bridges also shares the abuse that his family endured at the hands of his father, the racial profiling he received from the LAPD and his account of being molested by a trusted adult. .

Bridges, uses this book as an avenue to kill all myths about his life and shares his story with the world. He leaves no question unanswered as he tells the real deal about Todd Bridges while painting a vivid picture into his life as a drug dealer and drug user. As hard as it must be, he shares with readers his accounts of not only being molested but then having his father call him a liar.

This book is a real winner with me. I appreciate Bridges being open about his life and telling the truth. It takes heart and guts to talk about the good, bad and the ugly, but he did. He answered so many questions that people wanted to know the answer to and he even corrected some of those that people thought they had the answer to. I love this book not because of its redemption qualities but because Bridges is unapologetic when it comes to calling Hollywood for its racism. He even goes a step further and calls out the African-American

stars that live in this bubble thinking that things are equal because they get well paying roles. These actors are aware that many of their fellow deserving actors don't get the same treatment or deserving pay. He also went on to explain that in spite of him being sober for 17 years with a wife and two beautiful kids (he included pics), the media won't report that story. They continue to feed upon his past trouble and joke about his past when stars with similar stories like Drew Barrymore and Robert Downey, Jr. have been supported in their comebacks. I agree Todd, until we stand together nothing will be done about these injustices and blatant acts of racism in Hellywood.

This book was provided by the publisher and it did not influence this review.

Shani says

It's an okay book to read but at times it became too repetitive.

Lori says

A *3.5* Todd Bridges who was on Diff'rent Strokes.writes an honest sometimes hard to read about his life as a child actor, his abusive jealous father. the difficult times he had as a teenager, being harassed by the police. eventually he dealt with drugs, selling them and taking them.

Todd wrote about the good times and bad times filming the tv show that make him famous. by the third season Gary coleman and Gary's parents let their son's success go to their heads.and became difficult to be around on the set. Todd Dana were friends and sometimes "more than friends"

He was honest about being arrested for his drug use and jail time. he went though some very rough years with drugs. and unemployment. it was nice to read how he turned himself around is drug free working as an actor again. glad he turned his life around now. this was hard to read at times.

Myriam says

I am currently on a memoir reading roll and was curious about this book. I grew up liking Different Strokes and have always felt bad about childhood stars gone bad. The book shows Todd Bridge's voice and it seemed authentic to me.

Kimberly Hicks says

What's so funny for me is that you couldn't tell me I wasn't going to be Todd's girlfriend when I was a kid! I loved me some Willis Jackson. Those were the days of great TV!

The story of Todd Bridges was extremely captivating. I found his words to have special meaning and packed a huge punch. Going from child star to drug addict had to be one of the worst experiences any human being could endure. But no matter how low he sank, at one point in his life, his family never gave up hope, and it's a good thing because Todd is back in the acting game! Good for you Todd.

It's sad to realize he's the only surviving former child star from the show Diff'rent Strokes. I'm so thankful

that he was able to get the help he desperately needed to get him back on track. This was truly an outstanding read and very heartfelt. I could feel the pain Todd endured and relish as he triumphed! If you love memoirs, you've got to add this to your must read shelf! God bless you Todd, and may you continue to strive to be the best man you can be!

Zandra says

When he was younger, Todd Bridges was the “go to” African American child actor of his time. He was the first African American to have a recurring role on “The Waltons” and he appeared in “Little House on the Prairie” and the epic television mini-series “Roots”. He starred in “Fish” alongside Abe Vigoda before landing his best known role as Willis Jackson in “Diff'rent Strokes”. In this candid autobiography, Bridges opens up about his past which includes drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, run-ins with the law and time spent in jail. He also details how racism affected his life. Bridges takes full responsibility for his decisions and actions, while acknowledging the pain he felt growing up because of his relationship with his father, a man he perceived as uncaring and who was physically abusive towards him. Bridges was particularly devastated when his father sided with the man who sexually molested him as a child. After reading this book, I cannot help but to root for Bridges and hope that he is able to get another break-out acting role. Todd Bridges fans from back in the day will not be disappointed with this one.

Nick says

Killing Willis is the autobiography of Todd Bridges, former child star most famous for his role as Willis Jackson on the show Diff'rent Strokes. This book read like a very dark and dismal after school special. Todd Bridges started his acting career at a very young age and compared his fame to the likes of Michael Jackson. I was pretty young when Diff'rent Strokes was on the air, so I'm not sure if he was quite as famous as he thinks he was.

Towards the end of Diff'rent Strokes, Todd started to get heavy into drugs. He went from addict to dealer to pimp and inevitably to jail. I believe that his ultimate goal in writing this book was to provide hope by sharing many intimate details of his life. That it is possible to turn your life around even after you hit rock bottom. However, I often felt that while Todd was proclaiming how terrible his life as a drug addict was, he was almost proud of how high he could get and how many sexual partners he was able to acquire during his time as a junkie. Can't say that I recommend this one.

Rama says

An incredible story of Todd Bridges

In promoting this book, Todd Bridges in his interview with 'Today' show co-host Meredith Vieira on NBC on March 15, 2010, and later with Joy Behar on her show on CNN, spoke openly and honestly about his ordeal of physical, sexual and emotional abuse he faced from the very people who were responsible for his best interest and safety. He has lived through the most difficult days of abuse, the harassment from police; intense racism in Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in 1980s and 1990s, addiction to controlled substances, life on the mean streets of South Central Los Angeles, repeated criminal charges including a murder charge, and bad publicity surrounding Diff'rent Strokes other actors, Gary Coleman and Dana Plato.

Incidentally Dana died tragically at a very young age due to drug addiction and drug overdose on May 8, 1999. It is absolutely overwhelming for any man let alone a kid to face this trauma, yet Todd proves that you need to fight your way out, never relent to momentary setbacks, and you can still emerge as a reformed positive role model for kids who face similar challenges. He has turned his life around by becoming an author, a family man, a responsible father, working actor, director and a producer. This is absolutely incredible saga of an individual who had everything to the very lowest point in life. This is especially hard for fans who watched Diff'rent Strokes on TV regularly during 1970s and 80s.

The middle pages are especially hard to read as Todd Bridges describes in great detail his unfortunate addiction to various controlled substances and then becoming a drug trafficker himself living on the most dangerous streets of South Central LA, and dealing with worst offenders. Constant harassment of LAPD, racism he experienced from them at a very young age when he could not understand what it meant. Todd describes a very happy childhood growing in San Francisco where he faces very little racism, but moving to Los Angeles would change everything; it is not only fame, money, girls, drugs and sex but also the law going incessantly after him.

From this book, we also get to know the working relationship between three young actors of the show. Gary Coleman guided by his father was mean and unfriendly. The friendship between Dana Plato and Todd Bridges is not so sweet after all. Dana had addiction to drugs since the age of 13, and everyone on the set knew her problem because she was using them on the set and was a highly unreliable cast member. Both of them had several years of sexual relationship and drug use, but Todd Bridges still regards her as his best friend whom he wanted to help in her final days by persuading her to check into a rehab clinic. This story is deeply saddening and hard to read especially for fans who adored the show.

Danielle says

Wow, it's amazing that Todd lived through all that he did and came out at the other end. He did not hold anything back in this book and I give him credit for being able to admit to all the mistakes he made and learn from them. I actually got emotional at the end of the book, when he finally is getting his life back together again, because I think it speaks to every one of us. No matter how lost we are, or what mistakes we have made, we can always turn our lives around and live the lives we were meant to lead.

Marsha says

Todd Bridges was a teenage television actor who became famous for his role as "Willis Jackson" on the show Different Strokes, which ran several seasons from 1978 to 1986.

Bridges' father was very abusive, and so he found acting was a good break where he felt the cast of Different Strokes was more of a family to him. In addition, his father introduced him to a man in show business who became a male mentor. However, eventually this male mentor sexually abused Bridges, so Bridges had no strong male role model in his life.

Before the Different Strokes television show went off the air, Bridges sustained racial abusive from the Los Angeles police as they would harass him constantly as they didn't like that he was a young rich black man, so that brought down his self-esteem even lower. He got into taking drugs and it became even worse when the

show ended. He got addicted to “crack” and later morphine and hung out at drug houses and used drugs to manipulative women to have sex with him.

In this book, Bridges wrote about going to jail and prison because of his involvement with drugs and also about finally becoming clean and sober.

Sherrie74 says

For the most part a very easy read as in a not complicated story as we already know about a lot of the back history. But ... there are some chapters that are really dark and dangerous, mostly drug related and after effects that I just scanned through fast. It only took a couple of hours to read the 280 pgs. Agree with other posts, some parts repetitious and some sentences excessively wordy to add to the page content of book.

The DS years for the most part we already knew what happened on set and with GC's parents and situation but was unaware of Todd's personal home life that much, or the sexual assault he went through. Scary! And yes we all knew about his bad years of drug issues which are now in his past for close to 20 years and his life is now good Yeah Todd!

What I don't get, and this has nothing to do with Todd or his book, is that even after a law was passed in 1939 to protect child actors money that even in todays world the money can just be squandered. by either the parents or those assigned to invest it. For both Todd and Gary all their money was gone and there are still many others in the same situation.

Ice says

The former child star—best known as Willis Jackson on Diff'rent Strokes—shares the shocking but inspirational details of his struggles with addiction, brushes with the law, and fierce fight to carve a path through the darkness and find his true identity.

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Cuppuchina says

I loved watching Todd Bridges on Different Strokes. I was So excited when I saw him on OPRAH. That same evening I went online and bought his book.

The recollection of his past are repetitive in most of the chapters. Some of his experiences are too sad to read through but because its Todd Bridges' book and story I'll be courageous and read to the last page.

I am so proud of him. He is a great person. And he should be given the recognition that is rightfully his and deserves as an actor.

Carmen Turner says

I worked for Todd's father, Jim Bridges, who was Todd's agent and I was Jim's assistant, during the time Todd was still on Different Strokes. It was interesting and eye-opening to get the inside story on his life at home and career. Even though I worked for the family and went to the studio every week to watch the taping of the shows, I was still on the outside looking in at a very talented young actor who was dealing with racism and dysfunction all around him.
