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Hodges and Kisha

'My Kisha'

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BY AMANDA CREASEY ON JANUARY 8, 2020

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Local musician-writer publishes third book, urges people to 'tell their stories'

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When Charles R. Hodge Jr. graduated from high school, he didn't know how to write. "I come from a poverty-stricken area of nothing," he said. He was one of a few black students at a formerly all-white high school. "They put me in nothing but domestic classes," he explained. He managed to find a job driving a school bus, and recalls hearing the "kids talking about gerunds and verb tenses. I didn't know what they were talking about."

Later, Hodge joined the military. When he wrote a performance report that contained "a run-on sentence for three pages," he knew he had to make a change. He attended the University of Maryland, and "I read and read and read. I took every course they had for English."

Hodge's dedication to learn to write has paid off. Now, decades later, he is pleased to be the author of three self-published books. His first two books include a book of poetry, "Poems of Life."

"God woke me up one morning, and the poems were just coming to me," Hodge recalled. "My wife said, 'What're you doing, sitting on the bed?' I said, 'Please don't stop me,' but the inspiration had left."

Three or four months later, it returned, and Hodge was able to finish the book. "I am reading it now, and it's like it's all new to me. I don't feel like I wrote it."

He wrote his second book, *Autobiography of Junior Hodge* in December 1999, during a bout with colon cancer. "I'm not supposed to be here," he said. Hodge underwent six months of chemotherapy. "They cut me from my neck to my family jewels," he said. "I thought cancer was a death sentence, so I wanted to write and let my children and grandchildren know where I came from, and how I got to where I was. I want them to understand that 'you can do it.'" Hodge survived his cancer, and has been cancer-free for years.

His adopted daughter, Kisha Hodge, the inspiration for his most recent book, "My Kisha," has also battled cancer. "I always had the idea to write a book about Kisha," Hodge said, "but I kept procrastinating." When she faced a breast cancer diagnosis, Hodge knew it was time to stop putting the book off. "I wanted to tell her story. This girl had everything happen to her, and she is such a strong person. You never know what the day's going to bring. Something told me I need to get this thing done. So I did."

In addition to cancer, Kisha struggles with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. She has undergone a hysterectomy and a double mastectomy. "But she's still running around, jumping around, like nothing is going on," Hodge said of Kisha's fighting spirit and optimism.

Hodge said the tone of the book is encouraging. "The theme is, don't give up, Struggle for what you want to do."

Kisha inspired the writing of this book, but it wouldn't have been possible without a lesson from his mother.

"She used to make me say something, and I taught my children and teach my grandchildren to say it," Hodge said. "Someone said it couldn't be done, but he with a chuckle replied that maybe it could or maybe it couldn't, but wouldn't say so 'til he tried. Buckle right in with a bit of a grin. If you start to sing you will tackle the thing that couldn't be done, but he did it." The rhyme is inspired by a poem by Edgar Guest.

Hodge said that's how he got started writing. "I just kept thinking about what my mom said." The resulting three books speak volumes to the effectiveness of the jingle.

One of Hodge's pride points in "My Kisha" is that "some of her poems appear in the back. I'm proud that my daughter can see her poems in the book, and also that it's a book about her while she's still here. God has blessed us to let other people see how she has survived everything from rape to bullying to health struggles." Hodge and Kisha both hope the book will give strength to readers who face their own struggles. "Everybody has a story to tell," Hodge said, "and needs to tell that story, especially if it's something that can show other people the way." Kisha added, "Especially if it's something that can help people."

Hodge wrote the first draft of the manuscript in about six months, and from start to finish, the writing process lasted roughly a year. "I have a room upstairs where I like to write," he said. "When you got up there, it's peace. I finished the book up there."

Hodge said he "wrote the book with love. God gave her [Kisha] to me. My life right now is spent on her. Just to see her every day is a day of thanksgiving. That's why I wrote the book."

But books and poems aren't the only literature Hodge writes. After he read work by Langston Hughes, he began writing blues lyrics. He can be found the first Friday of each month playing at Poe's Pub in Richmond with his fellow musician, Zack Artis. They call themselves Spoonful. "Zac is the lead guitarist," Hodge said. "He's the baddest thing around." Hodge himself is the lead singer and harmonica player.

Hodge's book, "My Kisha," is currently available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com.

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