



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

By Todd Bridges

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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.

Todd Bridges has lived a life of remarkable twists and turns—from the greatest heights to the lowest lows imaginable. In this shocking but ultimately hopeful memoir, he proves that what he was really talking about was survival.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Todd Bridges was born in San Francisco, California in 1965. He became the first African-American child actor to have a recurring role on a successful TV series, *The Waltons*. He also appeared on *Little House on the Prairie*, and in the landmark miniseries *Roots*. He was a regular on the *Barney Miller* spinoff *Fish*, before landing his best-known role as Willis on *Diff'rent Strokes*.

Bridges has a brother and sister who are both actors, Jimmy Bridges and Verda Bridges. His father, James Bridges, Sr., became one of the first prominent black Hollywood agents, while his mother, Betty A. Bridges, was also an actress and later became one of Hollywood's greatest managers and acting coaches.

Today, Todd is a working actor, director, and producer and he and his brother James Jr., have partnered to establish their own production company, Little Bridge Productions. Todd is married and has a son, Spencir, and a daughter, Bo.

Sarah Tomlinson is a Los Angeles– and Brooklyn-based writer. Her writing has appeared in publications including *Marie Claire*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, Salon.com, and Vol1Brooklyn.com. She has ghostwritten nine books, including two uncredited *New York Times* bestsellers. Visit her online at SarahTomlinson.com and follow her alter ego, Duchess of Rock (@DuchessofRock), on Twitter.

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