Written by Kam Williams
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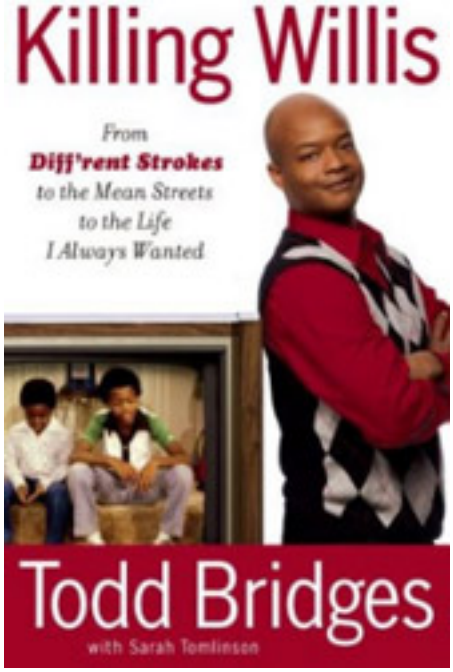

"All I ever wanted as a kid was to be a famous TV star... My dream came true when I was lucky enough to land the role of Willis Jackson on 'Diff'rent Strokes.' I thought I had it made, and for a little while, I did. But I didn't know God had other plans for me."
-- Excerpted from the Preface (pg. 1)

"What you talking 'bout, Willis" was Gary Coleman's character's signature catchphrase on "Diff'rent Strokes" which millions of viewers kept tuning in to hear every week over the course of the cursed TV show's eight-year run from 1978 until 1986. I say the sitcom was cursed because of the well-publicized host of woes which would be visited upon the trio of child actors who starred on the program.

The diminutive Coleman had to declare bankruptcy after his trust fund was squandered by his

parents. He ended up working as a security guard in a mall where he was charged with assault for punching a female patron.

Today, the 40 year-old virgin needs dialysis daily due to the congenital kidney disease which stunted his growth at 4'8". He was most recently back in the tabloids in January of this year when he was arrested for domestic violence.

The late Dana Plato, who played Kimberly on the program, died of a drug overdose in 1999. But that came after having her life savings stolen by her accountant, pulling an armed robbery, appearing nude in Playboy and making a porno film.

Todd Bridges, Coleman's big brother Willis on the show, had his own share of problems after the program was canceled. He not only ended up broke like his co-stars, but became a crackhead as well. He was later arrested for the attempted murder of another dealer and for stabbing his landlord in the chest in a dispute over unpaid rent.

In Killing Willis, Bridges honestly and eloquently chronicles his rise and fall in graphic detail, including his bottoming-out behind bars before finally finding redemption on the long road back to sobriety. Today, the happily-married father of two says, surprisingly, that he has no regrets because he feels blessed to have his wife and kids.

A heartbreaking memoir of innocence lost, exploitation, failing and recovery, with a happy ending that's all too rare when it comes to former child stars.

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

by Todd Bridges
with Sarah Tomlinson
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