

Book Reading and Signing

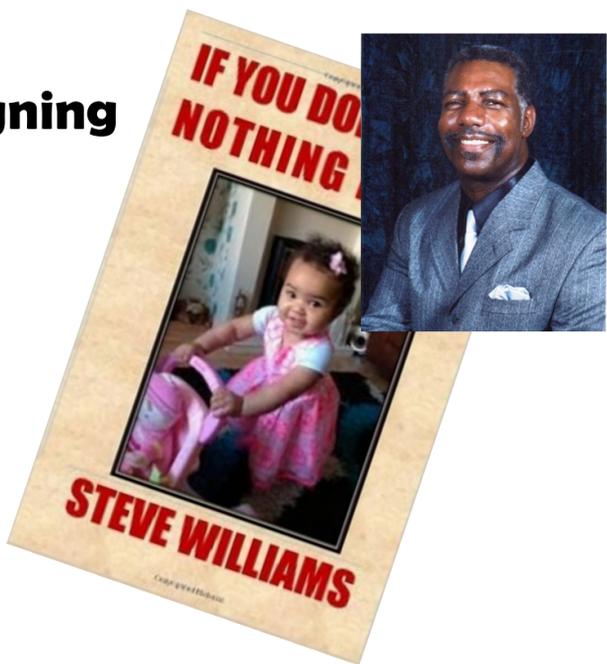
Steve Williams

“If You Don’t Push, Nothing Moves”

Saturday, November 16

11 am—1 pm

Georgetown Library



Author Steve Williams has rereleased his collection of inspirational poems *If You Don't Push Nothing Moves*. The compilation has found fans in young and old alike, even inspiring some rising stars of the acting world. What follows is an interview with Williams, in which he explains the thoughts and emotions that propelled his popular work.

These poems are deeply emotional. Are they all written from your own life experience?

Some are, and some aren't. A lot of people read my poems and think they come from personal experience, but many started as a story I heard, or a phrase that spoke to me. One poem that is very personal is *Sorry about the Confusion*, which I wrote when my wife and I separated, when my daughter was very young. It exposes how painful it was to upset the beautiful life of our two year old child.

But many of the other poems are just what good poets and writers do – put themselves in character by empathizing. The story *Summertime* was inspired by the famed Gershwin song, in which everything is perfect and easy. The poem is written from the perspective of an abandoned baby lying in his filthy crib because his mother never wanted him. The story *No Charge* is about a misguided 6 year old daughter who decides she wants to go live at a friend's house. Her mother cleverly tells her what she can pack with her, gently reminding her who bought all her things.

Many of the poems are written about children and teens that are facing hardships.

Definitely. Many of them are surrounded by conditions of poverty, neglect, abuse and other social challenges. These poems and stories will encourage people who are dealing with modern day issues. There are poems like *If a Girl Isn't Pretty*, which speak to finding joy and contentment from within, rather than the world around us.

Of course, you have some on the other end of the life cycle, like *Touch Base*, which starts out, “this one is for the old folks...”

The book covers the whole life spectrum, and the challenges of each age group. *The 23rd Psalm* is a good example; it's a piece about a woman finding strength in the scriptures as she trembles and sweats through drug withdrawal.

There's another story about a young woman getting a private concert from an unwitting church choir. It's so funny – even though it's a little sad.

Yes, it's entitled *Sunday to be Exact*, and I'm really very proud of the piece. It's about a young lady walking by a so-called “holy-rolly” church one Sunday. She hears a choir singing, a foot-stomping, hand-clapping song. She's just coming from buying 3 pieces of greasy fried chicken - and a biscuit. She sits down on a parked car in front of the church, open up her box of food and ‘starts greasing right there,’ while listening to the song. She cries until her eyes ‘had done dried,’ then cleans up her wrappers, and goes home purged, because she says ‘Honey, God knows they were singing that song for me. They knew that my man had done left me..... but nobody loves anybody all the time except my sweet Jesus.’

I adore it – you can just see the scene, and her voice comes through so strongly. And it obviously struck a chord with an aspiring young actress...

Yes, the actress is Danielle Brooks of Greenville, SC who performed my story during her audition to get into the prestigious S.C. Governor's School of the Arts. Danielle liked the story so much, four years later she used it again at her audition, this time into the world renowned Julliard School of Drama in New York City. Danielle graduated from Julliard and is currently starring in the popular show, “Orange is the New Black” on Netflix channel.

Lee Thompson Young of Irmo, SC also used one of my poems, *A Few Good Men*, on his way to stardom. I met him years ago, when he was ten or eleven. He discovered the poem when a mutual friend gave his mother a copy of my book. He performed the poem in a popular play at Clemson University that summer and did a phenomenal job. A few months later, I heard his parents and friends were raising money to send him to New York to hone his acting skills and soon after, there he was the star of Nickelodeon's “The Famous Jett Jackson.” More recently, Lee co-starred in the popular show “Rizzoli and Isles.” I was deeply saddened to learn that he passed away at just 29 years old a few weeks ago.

Poetry is a vehicle to console and inspire. *A Few Good Men* was written to encourage men to be better fathers, better grandfathers, husbands, uncles, brothers - just better men, but if a ten year old finds value in the message - all the better.

The poems are all moving. Are there any that still give you goosebumps when you read them?

There are three that really move me. One still brings me to tears. It's entitled *Expectations*, and it's about a little girl in third grade of one of our urban promised lands. The poem was inspired by a quote from Martin Luther King: “Where there's no great expectation, there's no great disappointment.” This little girl in a large city is not the most affluent, but she picks up the subtle social cues of her environment from her teachers, neighbors and parent. The girl's class is doing a project in which they're writing a 20-year will. The written will projects how they want their future to unfold. The student writes about her alcoholic mother, her absent father, her mother's mean boyfriend, a neighbor who calls her ‘black and ugly,’ and a teacher who she overhears telling another teacher that, ‘these ghetto kids are so dumb.’ With tears in her eyes, the little girl concludes her will by stating, “20 years from now, I will try NOT to live up to your expectations of me.” So often we tell our kids they are somebody, that they're blessed and highly favored, but “what we do speaks so loudly, they can't hear what we're saying.”

Another poem I'm fond of is *Adulthood*, which explores the perils of becoming an adult. The period in our lives when we no longer let our parents do the worrying, when we're responsible for making our way in the world, when we struggle to make ends meet, when - “*Child! My rent is paid up, but we ain't got a thing to eat!*”

You often speak to groups, and read a few selections. What pieces do you like to perform?

I enjoy performing the poem *Tell Your Sons and Daughters*. When I'm speaking to groups, I particularly like challenging young people. I let them know that as they begin to fly high in life, there will always be those who will attempt to stand on their wings. But weeping endures only for a night and there is “no height, no depth, no hurt, no pain, no cancer, crack, AIDS, sexism, poverty, or even family, that can hold them back because in Christ they are somebody.”

Another favorite is the poem *Be Uncommon*. This poem was written in honor of Georgetown's great Joseph Haynes Rainey and originally performed in March of 1993 at the dedication of Joseph Rainey Park on Front St. My dad was among the scores of dignitaries and hundreds of people present at the ceremony. On that glorious day, he was never more proud of me. In the poem, I quoted Henry David Thoreau, who said, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer - let him step to the music which he hears, however measured it may be” and Dr. Martin Luther King who said, “Be a bush if you can't be a tree, but be the best bush that you can be.” Be uncommon.

What do you hope readers take away when they read your poems?

They can find hope and assurance that they are not alone in facing life's adversities – but they are equal to the challenge. They should know that the helping hand they seek is often found at the end of their arm

I hope the stories and characters in my book inspire them to aim high. I hope *If You Don't Push Nothing Moves* motivates them to revisit their own dreams and aspirations because “poverty of things is no excuse for poverty of will and spirit” says Marian Wright Edelman. I'd rather they attempt to do something great and fail than to do nothing at all and succeed.

If You Don't Push Nothing Moves is available locally at *Aunny's Country Kitchen Restaurant*, and *Lamar's Fish and Chips Restaurant* in Georgetown and soon in your local libraries and bookstores. You can also order the book on Amazon, or purchase one from Steve Williams at 424steve@gmail.com or call (864)346-0749.