

# Climbing Higher

## Book Review By: KamWilliams

*"What was there to live for? My marriage was on the rocks, my body was either numb or on fire and it was only going to get worse. Whatever was going on with my immune system was messing with my brain chemically and making me depressed. I was still swallowing Percocets and Vicodins, trying to lessen the pain I was in. I had no appetite for food, sex or conversation.*

*I didn't want to see my friends or family, I couldn't work out. I was hiding my disease from everyone. I felt alone, hopeless and sorry for myself. I didn't just have low self-esteem—I had no self-esteem. But what I did have were guns. I sat on the floor in my T-shirt, parachute pants and sandals, lined up a few speed loaders with .357 rounds in them and put the gun to my head."*

**—Montel Williams on dealing with Multiple Sclerosis.**

In 1991, after a decorated career as an intelligence officer in the armed forces, Montel Williams burst upon the scene as a syndicated TV talk show host. He became known for his no-nonsense style of tough love directed at delinquent teenage guests who had bottomed-out after some combination of anti-social behaviors resulting in an unwanted pregnancy, drug addiction, alcoholism, illiteracy, homelessness, arrest and incarceration.

What nobody knew was that Montel had been battling his own demons for most of his life. Although it was not diagnosed until 1999, he had been hiding an array of mysterious symptoms for over 20 years. Over that span, he saw 30 doctors but, as he recalls, "Only two of them thought I should be tested for MS and I talked them out of it."

He finally bottomed out in 1998, after the toll of a frivolous sexual harassment lawsuit left him worn down and in the intensive care unit of Beth Israel hospital with only a 50-50 chance of surviving. The picture he paints of that near-death experience is frightening.

Thank God, Montel was resuscitated—otherwise, we would never have "Climbing Higher," one of those "as told to" biographies, ghost-written by Lawrence Grobel. "Climbing Higher" is actually a cut above the average bio by a hack writer as it makes Montel almost jump from the pages. He recalls critical moments of his interesting life in prose so vivid it all but leaps off the pages. We learn about how his resolve to achieve was forged by his having to walk a gauntlet of hateful Whites calling him the N-word when he was integrating a school at only six years of age. We also hear about his troubled second marriage to Bambi Jr., a stripper who has been a guest on his show.

Above all, "Climbing Higher" is the inspirational tale of a proud but vulnerable soul, a man initially in denial, battling MS, misdiagnosed, losing it all, and terribly depressed. Like Job, he is ultimately resurrected from the depths of despair after he accepts his disease and finds new meaning in life. A sobering story I suspect will resonate with anyone who has been forced to stare his or her own mortality in the face.

## JUST ANOTHER IDEA

Fresh and new to the scene is "Just Another Idea" Production Company, founded by writer/poet, Irma Taylor, a lifelong resident of Winston-Salem. Ms. Taylor's experience includes hosting a book review column with the AC Phoenix, being published in several anthologies, and having poetry published with N'Joy Publications of Greensboro, NC. She spearheaded a reading enrichment program at the East Winston Library, and her most recent endeavor, the play "Damaged Woman's Blues" is currently in it's rehearsal phase.

Just Another Idea Production Company intends to be a creative outlet for local artists to display talents that may otherwise go unnoticed. Forthcoming will be a monthly newsletter containing information on locally produced workshops, social events, literary contests, and other artistic interests.

### JUST ANOTHER IDEA PRODUCTION COMPANY

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*Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season  
we shall reap if we do not lose heart — Galatians 6:9*

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