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LIFE AFTER LIFE

A Story of Rage and Redemption

Evans D. Hopkins

Praise for
LIFE AFTER LIFE:
A Story of Rage and Redemption

By Evans D. Hopkins

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"*Life After Life* is a wonderful autobiography and a touching and enlightening story. Evans Hopkins's writing is vivid and compelling, specifically the passages about his attempted escapes, the atrocities of prison, and his discovery of love he has for humanity even though it is often unlovable. His honesty about his own culpability rings through clearly and courageously."

—Sandra Brown

"*Life After Life* is a low-keyed but compelling account of the Black Panther Party's impact, both positive and negative, on a young, southern, black man's journey to completeness in racist America. Evans D. Hopkins has bared his soul to help us understand why thousands like him took up the extreme challenge and are better for it."

—David Graham DuBois, President & CEO, The W.E.B. DuBois Foundation, Inc.

"Evans D. Hopkins reminds us of what happens to a dream deferred in this powerful story of a youth almost destroyed by his anger at a society that at best ignores a black man and at worst finds new ways to lynch him. What makes this book remarkable is the journey to redemption, the story of how the lost youth finds himself in the silence of a prison cell and continues to grow as a human today. **We should all rejoice!**"

—Patrice Gaines, author of *Laughing In The Dark*

"*Life After Life* is the story of the search for identity, one man's struggle to create a more just world, the descent into inexplicable rebellion and crime, and the ways in which prison can set a person free. This is a beautiful, heartbreaking, and, in the end, inspiring book."

—Marita Golden, author of *Don't Play in the Sun: One Woman's Journey Through the Color Complex*

"Hopkins literally wrote his way out of the Virginia State Penitentiary with articles for the *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, and other publications...He adopted writing as his "escape" methodology...Hopkins found that "love for a world of readers I continued to believe in" had finally conquered his rage...**Soul-baring revelations** acknowledge racism's impact, but make no excuses for the author's mistakes."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"[F]ascinating memoir of prison issues and personal redemption."

—*Booklist*

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There are many people who wish they could be given a second chance at life, but few who actually get that opportunity. It is even more uncommon when that opportunity is given to a man who has received a life sentence in prison. Evans D. Hopkins knew that his hope for a second chance would never become a realization until he could let go of the rage that had landed him in prison. His exceptional gift for words not only helped him let go of his rage, it also helped him create a new life for himself when he was released from prison after twenty years. In *LIFE AFTER LIFE: A Story of Rage and Redemption* (Free Press: publication date: April 12, 2005; \$25.00), Evans recounts a life lost and then found again through the power of the written word.

Evans was born and raised in Danville, Virginia, which even today maintains the claim of The Last Capital of the Confederacy. His youth was marked by conflict over racial identity, as he oscillated between adopting and then rejecting the stereotypes attributed to his race. As a teenager he joined the Black Panther Party, and at 18 traveled to Panther headquarters in Oakland, California, where he spent two years writing for the organization's newspaper, covering the trial of the San Quentin Six, becoming the group's historian, and working with Party founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, taking part in their move into political activity when Seale ran for mayor of Oakland. But he was also witness to the internal strife that brought about the party's downfall.

When he returned to Danville, Hopkins was a different man, disillusioned and filled with rage and a legacy of militancy. He staged a bank robbery, alone. He was captured and served four years in a prison for youthful offenders, where he worked in the prison library with Nathan McCall, who would later write the bestseller, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*.



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Upon his release, Hopkins tried a new life in Danville, but after two bleak winters of poverty and frustration, he committed another robbery, which netted him a sentence of life in prison. He was enraged that the all-white jury found him so unworthy of redemption.

After an aborted escape attempt, Hopkins was sent to Virginia's worst prison, the ancient State Penitentiary. There, while continuing plans to escape, Hopkins began to write, reaching a national audience in 1982 when his inside account of an electrocution (entitled, "Who's Afraid of Virginia's Chair?") was published in the *Washington Post*. He continued to write for the *Post* and other national and regional periodicals, becoming one of the country's best-known prison writers. All the while, Hopkins experienced isolation and heartbreak: the loss of his son, his best friend, and two loves — one to a car accident and the other to the impossibility of dating an incarcerated man.

In 1988 he was transferred to a rural prison fifty miles southwest of Richmond, a modern Orwellian institution surrounded by miles of gleaming concertina razor wire and acres of empty woods and countryside, where he continued to write despite threats from authorities.

Released from prison in 1997, Hopkins struggled to cope with the demands of daily life, and a world that was new after a lengthy incarceration. It was a world in which he experienced nightmares about his past, and cultural and social alienation in the backwater of Danville. He also faced the challenge of providing care for elderly parents with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Technically a free man, Hopkins' sense of confinement lived on, but he was grateful that he could be there for his family, as they had been for him throughout his imprisonment.

In this new life, his life after a life sentence, Hopkins' true heart is revealed, as he understands the return to love he has been seeking and realizes the nature of a fulfilling redemption.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Evans Hopkins grew up in Danville, Virginia, where he still resides and works as a freelance writer. His pieces have appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, *Slate*, *NERVE.com*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *In These Times* and *Southern Exposure*, among others. His writing has been anthologized in the *Prentice-Hall College Reader*, Greywolf Press's *The Private I* and *The Best of NERVE*. *Life After Life* is his first full-length book.

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