

FORT LAUDERDALE'S CITY MAGAZINE

# GO RIVERWALK

A PUBLICATION OF RIVERWALK FORT LAUDERDALE • SINCE 2003

VOL.14 NO.10 OCTOBER 2017



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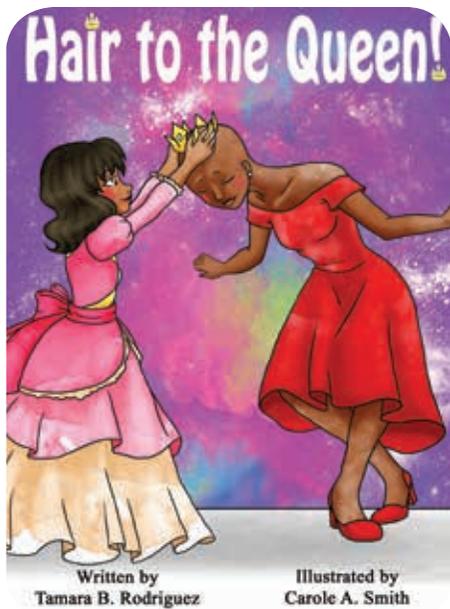
DOWNTOWN  
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FLORIDA DAY OF THE DEAD CELEBRATION

# CROWN OF BEAUTY

FIRST-TIME AUTHOR TAMARA B. RODRIGUEZ DELICATELY EXPLAINS THE REALITIES OF CANCER IN HER CHILDREN'S BOOK *HAIR TO THE QUEEN*

WRITER ALEXANDRA ROLAND



In most cases, the “C” word universally evokes fear. Cancer can mean so many different realities for one who is diagnosed and their family. As gut-wrenching as it is, adults can come to understand this. Explaining it to a child is another story.

This was part of Tamara B. Rodriguez’s plight. A healthy, active mother of two, she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2014 at age 35. With a double mastectomy and chemotherapy ahead, she struggled with how to break it to her two daughters ages four and six. Scouring the web for uplifting and friendly literature to aid her in this process and coming up empty handed propelled Rodriguez on the path to authorship.

“I just couldn’t find the words to tell them what mommy was going to go through,” she says. “The transformation, the surgeries – it was very difficult. I wanted to be honest with them. I thought they would get it. I just needed to find the right words.”

In 2016, she published *Hair to the Queen*, a children’s book that aims to graciously and delicately explain cancer to juveniles ages five to 10. “Cancer is often seen as that word that you whisper or you don’t say to the kids. And I didn’t want that,” she says. “I wanted to destigmatize the word. I wanted it to be a part of my children’s vocabulary so that it wasn’t scary. So I wanted

to not only say the word in the book but also define it.” Rodriguez consulted medical care professionals to ensure an accurate yet gentle characterization of the illness.

The 32-page book follows the story of two girls whose mother has lost her hair because of cancer. Rodriguez remembers going through the same process, explaining it to her girls, and using it as a teaching moment in what makes a person beautiful. “I was losing chunks [of hair]. And I had two options. Either shave my head or wear a wig. I decided to wear a wig.”

The girls were initially disappointed with the change in Rodriguez’s appearance. “That was a turning point for me because I said, ‘I cannot raise girls to think that hair defines a person.’ I thought, ‘If I die tomorrow, I want to leave that one thing to



Above and facing page: Rodriguez’s *Hair to the Queen* book tour



*Hair to the Queen* author Tamara B. Rodriguez

my girls, to know that a person is defined by their character. A person is defined by their heart. A person is defined by how they treat people. Not by their hair.” These life lessons became a secondary basis for the book. “I wanted to create a story where the mother didn’t have hair but she was beautiful, empowered, loved, and supported by her family.”

Months later, on a summer family trip down to the Keys, the heat made wearing her wig almost unbearable. Rodriguez relates, “They said, ‘Take off your wig, mommy.’ And it was as if that was the pass, the green light that they were OK with it and that I should be OK with it.” Her first time in public without hair, they pulled up to a Starbucks coffee shop. “And the gentleman at the drive-through says, ‘Hey, you look gorgeous.’ And the girls heard and said, ‘Told you, mommy.’ They had become more sensitive, understanding, and caring.” In the story, quite the same happens. Even though the main character’s mother has lost her hair to cancer, she is still beautiful and strong to her in a way that a mom always is.

Although specific to her own story, the book has impacted readers going through similar circumstances – exactly what Rodriguez hoped for. On her recent book tour, a man stood up and confessed the book gave him the courage to tell his young son of his kidney disease. An emotional woman at the 2016 Miami International Book Fair told Rodriguez

she wishes she had *Hair to the Queen* to explain her mother’s death to her little daughter. “To me that spoke volumes,” she says.

Rodriguez’s literary pursuits are just a facet of her life in total. In addition to being the CFO of the Miami-based Fatima Group, she serves as the treasurer on the board of directors for the Alfred Béliard Foundation, an organization that focuses on raising awareness of cancer resources in her hometown of Cap-Haïtien, Haiti. The net proceeds from the sale of *Hair to the Queen* books go towards the organization’s mission.

For more information on the *Hair to the Queen* book and the Alfred Béliard Foundation, visit [www.hairtothequeenbook.com](http://www.hairtothequeenbook.com) and [www.fondationalfredbeliard.org](http://www.fondationalfredbeliard.org) respectively.

Purchase the book on Amazon or [www.booksandbooks.com](http://www.booksandbooks.com). *Hair to the Queen*’s sequel, which follows the story of a boy who has leukemia, is already underway. 

