

God's Sustaining Hand: A Life of Hope

Diane Rodriguez-Burton

Amazon KDP

(37pp)

978-1-961507-82-1

A woman praises God for the good in her life despite the challenges she's faced in the testimonial memoir God's Sustaining Hand.

A brief, earnest testimonial pamphlet, Reverend Diane Rodriguez-Burton's *God's Sustaining Hand* conveys her congregant Henrietta Patrice Evans's reasons for having faith, crediting God with seeing Evans through tough times.

Its short space cushioned by pages devoted to supplementary materials, including a dedication, a biblical quote, an introduction, and a preface, the book's true subject is obscured at first. A quarter of the way in, it's clarified that Rodriguez-Burton is acting as the conduit for Evans's testimonial work. Even after Evans is properly introduced, though, the book remains vague when it comes to details about her life—for example, alluding to childhood abuse and misuse without defining the parameters of either.

In the end, the initial space created between Evans and her own story brings the book's autobiographical claims into question; its delivery falters. It is also marred by grammatical errors, including missing quotation marks, misused punctuation, and unnecessary capitalization; its diction is imprecise, some clichés are included, and the re-created dialogue is awkward. There are distracting instances of repetition in short spaces, diluting the power of individual claims. These issues persist throughout.

Once Evans is given the space to tell her own story, the book becomes somewhat more direct, though its strokes remain broad; there is no true sense of the particulars of given events, and the people in Evans's life are sketched in at best. Evans speaks to her North Carolina roots and to the difficulties of growing up biracial and poor; she discusses how her father leaving the family when she was young forced her into adulthood roles early. Her mother left not long thereafter, resulting in additional disarray. Evans became pregnant as a teenager but had little support for her growing family; she was widowed young.

Evans laments never having had a childhood; she speaks with longing of the departed grandmother who was the only adult to honor her childhood needs. Her stories about these hardships feed into the book's ultimate aim of praising God for the good in her life despite the challenges she faced. "I didn't always know the Lord through the pardoning of my sins," Evans says, "but I can't help but thank Him for knowing all about me, loving me when I did not love myself, and keeping me."

To complement such praise, the titular motif recurs throughout, though without the benefit of persuasive context. Indeed, there's little attempt to pull the audience toward Evans's perspective regarding God's presence in the named events; the book's theological reach is too limited to be compelling. And the book ends not with personal triumphs, but with Rodriguez-Burton's notes on Evans's church service—a warm but impersonal conclusion.

A faith-filled memoir about trusting in God despite a bevy of personal obstacles, *God's Sustaining Hand* is a succinct testimonial work.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November 26, 2024)

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