

**Q&A with Askhari Johnson Hodari and Yvonne McCalla Sobers,  
authors of  
LIFELINES**

*The Black Book of Proverbs*

(On Sale: November 10, 2009; \$19.99; Broadway Books)

**Where did the idea for LIFELINES come from?**

For over a decade, we have shared proverbs with each other via e-mail to teach each other, to encourage, guide, instruct, and to inspire each other. So, we agreed to pool our proverb resources and share some of our collection with the world.

**How did you select the proverbs for LIFELINES?**

The proverbs selected themselves. We have a collection of over 7,000 proverbs, but once we agreed to a Life cycle format, either the proverbs fit, or they did not. Our major requirements were that the proverbs be of reliable African origin and culturally relevant or culturally specific. We tend to favor proverbs speaking of crocodiles, drums, baskets, yams, gourds, etc. On the other hand, we do not feel as close to proverbs that speak about dragons, knights, castles, kangaroos, horses, etc.

**Do you have a favorite proverb?**

Our favorite proverbs vary depending on our current situations and experiences. Currently, some of our favorite inspirational proverbs include:

- “When your sister does your hair, you do not need a mirror.” (Africa)
- “Even a poor rat has at least one hole.” (U.S. Black Belt South)
- “It is better to walk than to grow angry with the road.” (Senegal, Gambia)

**Is there a message in LIFELINES that you would like readers to grasp?**

The overarching message that is not necessarily specific to the proverbs is this: Africa is the mother of civilization, and thus, is the mother of wisdom and experience. Africa is culturally relevant. So that, no matter what you are going through, there is some ancient African intelligence to hold on to, there is always African wisdom that can act as a lifeline, if we are only willing to take hold.

**What features makes LIFELINES stand out as a proverb resource?**

LIFELINES comes from the minds and hearts of two women, who total eleven decades on this Earth. One of us, Yvonne, is from Jamaica and another, Askhari is from the U.S. Black belt south. Therefore, their perspective, worldview and age span makes this collection different from any other proverb books, in general, and African proverb books, in particular. In terms of the actual book, the life-cycle format is unique and the story-poem arrangement of the proverbs is special.

**How did you go about illustrating LIFELINES?**

**Katie:** To create the illustrations for Lifelines, I considered two major factors: first, the essence of the proverbs and second, the everyday moments, lives, objects and places where all of that essence lives. Each proverb spoke volumes of humanity and all of its complexity in one simple statement. These illustrations are my humble attempt to do the same visually. —continued—

**Do you have a favorite LIFELINES proverb that inspired a particular illustration?**

**Katie:** The proverb that I think sung most true in my own heart was “*No rain, no rainbow*” from Jamaica. There are so many rainy phases any one person, any painting or project goes through before their rain finds the sun. For me, that proverb celebrates the whole journey.

**What do proverbs mean to you, and what do you suppose they mean to other people?**

**Katie:** To me, these proverbs celebrate a collective human experience. They help us step outside of ourselves and recognize that as consuming as our own life experience might be, we are indeed just one small part of a much greater story. My guess is that for other people as well, these proverbs identify, support, encourage, and give us the gift of pause.

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For more information on **LIFELINES** or Askhari & Yvonne, please contact the

Broadway Books publicity department:

Caroline Sill (212) 782-8943 [csill@randomhouse.com](mailto:csill@randomhouse.com)