

## Clarksdale native to sign first novel at library

By Rebekah M. Yearout The Press Register | Posted: Thursday, July 30, 2015 3:00 pm

Shulanda Hastings, a Clarksdale native, will be at the library Aug. 4 with copies of her first novel, “Marriage Thorn.”

Hastings, who now lives in Memphis, is a mental health advocate and an ordained minister who said she tries to bring messages of mental health awareness to the church and open the doors for people with histories of abuse to start a dialog with others to begin “the healing process.”

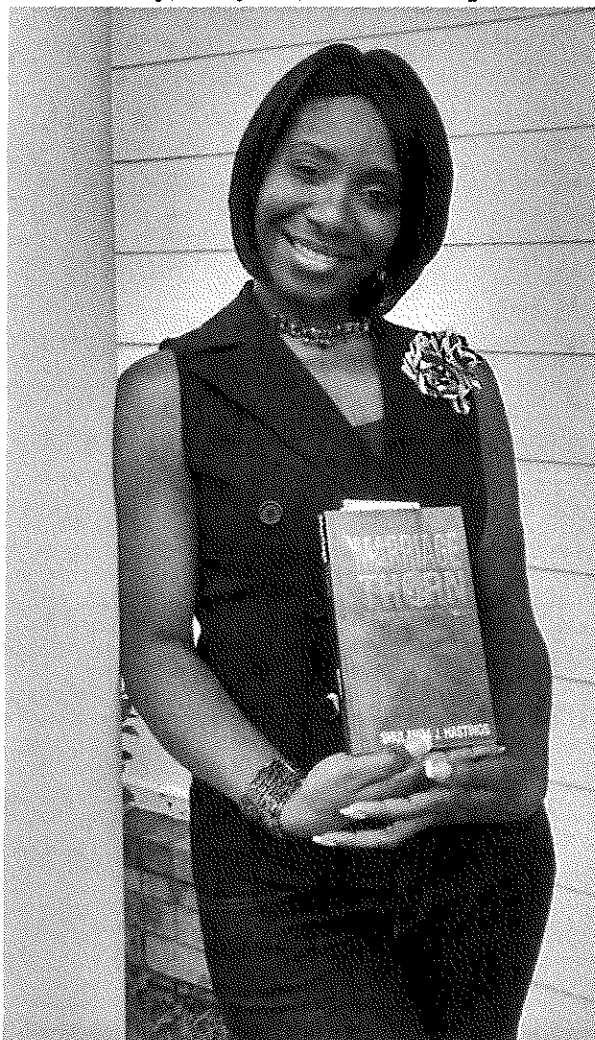
Hastings has published two devotional books, and written more than 100 devotional messages and meditations, and her ministry, Spirit Realm Divine Manifestation, was founded in 2005 through the release of weekly devotional messages. “Marriage Thorn” is her first novel in a series called “The Beauty of My Thorns.”

She said she knew she wanted to start writing at a young age, although her public speaking skills came to her later.

“I have been writing since I was about 7 years old. I remember being even in the fifth grade putting together my first book in Clarksdale. I’ve always known it was one of the gifts I have and something I love to do,” Hastings said, adding that her teachers knew she wasn’t big on oratory at that age, so they would let her write essays instead of give a presentation in front of the class.

Raised by her grandmother, Hastings said her writing talents were nurtured at home and her public speaking skills honed as she got older.

“She always encouraged me in everything I wanted to do, she probably motivated more of my public speaking, but she always nurtured my desire to write,” Hastings said. She also credited the teachers at Immaculate Conception, including Sister Teresa Shields, with influencing her to write



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Shulanda Hastings, a native of Clarksdale, has released her first novel, “Marriage Thorn,” copies of which she will be signing at the Carnegie Public Library on Aug. 4.

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“That’s where I really got the inspiration, because of my schoolteachers there, Sister Nancy and Sister Teresa,” Hastings said. “Later at Clarksdale High School ... my English teachers were some of my major inspirations for writing.”

Mental health advocacy is a field that, for her, hits home. Two weeks after her high school graduation, her brother committed suicide, and she said they were very close growing up.

“In fact, I always thought I’d see him again, of course I’d thought I’d spend the summer with him (that year),” Hastings said. “Of course it affected me in different ways, you go through the denial, the blame; I wish I could have said something, reached out, it even caused me to experience stages of depression myself.”

In her advocacy, which includes speaking at churches and to youth groups, Hastings said she targets adolescents and young adults because they have the highest rate of suicide compared to other age groups. Also, she said, a lot of people suffering from depression don’t go to their doctors; many turn to their church leaders for help, and she said there’s been an increase in the number of pastors and church leaders who have committed suicide.

“It’s not just the members, but the leaders are having problems,” Hastings said. “The ministry leaders, if they can’t unfold the things going on within their lives... they can’t help others. I try to break those barriers so we can actually get them the help and connect them with others who may be going through the same type of experience, so it won’t have to get so far that they commit suicide.”

Her “Beauty of My Thorns” series talks about domestic violence, sexual, physical and emotional abuse, even within a marriage, she said.

“The book of Paul talks about having a thorn in one’s side... which is symbolic of the different barriers and issues like domestic violence, mental illness, sexual and spiritual physical abuse that happens within marriages and families,” Hastings said. “These issues are so sensitive... my inspiration was to bring more awareness and start breaking those barriers. I wrote it to try to break those barriers so we can get to a place of healing and have healthy relationships.”

Although she said she likes to target women and young ladies, men have read her books, she said, and told her they found them helpful, even “Marriage Thorn,” which is a book written from a woman’s point of view.

“I do have men who read some of my devotional writing, so of course I had a couple of men saying, ‘Are you bashing men in this book?’” Hastings said, with a laugh. “I’ve even had some pastors read the book and give me some insight, so they’ve benefited from it as well and taken it to women in their church.”

“Marriage Thorn” is about women who try to find answers to the troubles in their relationships through God, said Hastings. Although lots of people have troubled marriages, the main message behind the book is there are still reasons to honor and celebrate their relationships, and work to fix the issues.

“There’s still beauty, even if it seems like it’s so hard,” Hastings said.

Her “Beauty of My Thorns” conference kicked off in Clarksdale Feb. 7 at King’s Temple M.B. Church, and she also hosted a women’s conference at that church. She said she’s taken the conference to other towns in the area, and that helps connect women with different backgrounds and different problems in their lives.

Her next book will talk about issues within the church, appropriately titled “Church Thorns.”

“It will still follow the same storyline of the same characters... so it will still be focused on those characters, but also extend more into the church area, and issues that occur inside the churches,” she said.

Hastings will be at Carnegie Public Library Tuesday, Aug. 4 at noon for a book signing and copies of “Marriage Thorn” will be for sale, and the e-book is available, too. More information about Hastings is on her website, <http://www.shulandajhastings.com>.

Rebekah Yearout is the news editor for the Press Register and can be reached at 662-627-2201 or at [news@pressregister.com](mailto:news@pressregister.com).