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Childhood reflections of Civil Rights Era

Child of civil rights movement, now peace activist, shares her story

(WHITETHORN, Calif.) In celebration of Personal History Month in May, Cozilove Enterprises releases a memoir that illustrates what living in the segregated South was like for a young black child. In *Suitcase Full of Dreams*, author Hoy Kersh gives readers access to the sorrows and joys of growing up in the dirt-road, Jim Crow South in the 1940s and early 50s, just prior to the Civil Rights Movement.

Throughout the book, Kersh shares her personal memories, including those of various historical figures who inspired her - Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr. - all from a child's perspective. She spent most of her days fending off the Ku Klux Klan, questioning authority and avoiding her mother's heavy hand, but Kersh still managed to remain compassionate – and determined.

Born in Clarksdale, Miss., birthplace of the blues, Kersh's father was the son of a German sheriff who had a black mistress. The harsh reality of racism first hit her when her grandfather was murdered because of their relationship. The Klan drove Kersh's family out of town, forcing them into Mobile, Ala. where she spent the duration of her childhood. Her writing captures the anguish of the time:

That night, while Grandpa's soul was leaving his body and his blood bathed the damp ground, the Klansmen came to our house. There must have been thirty or forty men dressed in white robes. They were a sinister crowd. With hoods over their faces, they carried torches and shotguns. Surrounding the house, one of them called Grandma out to the front porch and told her (to leave). The dark forces had their way and we were running for our lives. I was way too little to understand that night of terror, but the tale has been told so many times. I can see it, taste the fear, feel Grandma's heart beat way too fast, and see Mama's young woman face become old for the moment.

– Excerpted from *Suitcase Full of Dreams*

Many years later, not wanting to remain “stuck in the quicksand of the South,” Kersh left her family behind and moved to Chicago as a teenager. She is currently a songwriter, music performer and passionate peace activist. She has three grown children and resides in Northern California.

Suitcase Full of Dreams by Hoy Kersh (Cozilove Enterprises, May 15, 2010, ISBN 978-0-9823165-1-1, \$14.00)

To schedule an interview with Hoy Kersh, please contact Elaine Krackau at
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About Hoy Kersh, author of *Suitcase Full of Dreams*

Growing up in the Deep South prior to the Civil Rights Movement, Hoy Kersh devoured books and learning, and despite being an African-American girl in 1950s Alabama, she was never afraid to speak her mind. At the tender age of 16, Kersh left behind her family and the Deep South for Chicago, where she struck out to pursue equality, truth and opportunity.

“I wanted to leave Alabama. Hell, everybody seemed to move in slow motion to me, slow, scared. There were too many killings and beatings. The law was definitely not on our side. Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, new leaders, countless voices were rising, and I was stuck in the quicksand of the South,” writes Kersh in her memoir, *Suitcase Full of Dreams*. “The train at night wailed in the distance, promising faraway lands, sweet streets paved with gold, and kind faces not prejudiced against you at every step. Me, the naïve dreamer, head full of hopes and visions, I was leaving.”

Years after fleeing the turmoil of Civil Rights era Alabama, Kersh became a songwriter and music performer, eventually producing two albums and touring the country with her band, Massawa and various reggae artists such as Nadine Sutherland and Everton Blender. She has also emceed Reggae on the River, an annual reggae festival in California, for more than 20 years.

Inspired by Bob Marley nearly 40 years ago, Kersh moved to Jamaica where she built an organic farm and taught reading and writing to adults at the local night school. Kersh has lived there on and off ever since. Her band worked in Negril, Jamaica backing Yellow Man and other Jamaican artists.

Now living in the woods of Northern California, Kersh works with students at a rural Pacific Northwest school on a video documentary about logging and the regional water crisis, issues close to her heart. Her writing has inspired the students to positive action in local environmental matters.

A lifelong antiwar activist and environmentalist, Kersh is active in local and regional peace movements. She continues to write and promote music and is at work on her second book. She is the mother of three grown children.

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Sample Interview Questions for Hoy Kersh, author of *Suitcase Full of Dreams*

1. Tell us about your book, *Suitcase Full of Dreams*
2. You start the book with information about your grandfather. What is his significance?
3. Who are some of the historical figures you write about in the book? Who stands out the most?
4. What made you so different from your brothers and sisters?
5. For those who didn't experience the oppression of the south during that time, what is something they would be surprised to know?
6. Would you say that films based on this time period accurately reflect the activities of the time?
7. How did you work up the courage to leave home when you were so young?
8. Why did you feel compelled to tell your story?
9. The story ends as you leave for Chicago – are you working on a sequel?
10. How did your family fare during the Civil Rights Movement?
11. What do you want readers to take away from your story?
12. What is your website?
13. Do you have anything else to add?

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