## 'From Liberty to Magnolia'

Author to talk, sign books Tuesday at McComb Library

> BY ERNEST HERNDON ENTERPRISE-JOURNAL

Janice S. Ellis grew up on a cotton farm in Amite County. Now she owns a farm.

She went to school in a small rural schoolhouse. Now she has a Ph.D.

She grew up in a house with a fireplace for heat, hand-drawn well for water and a garden for food. Now she's a retired executive who has written for numerous newspapers, magazines and websites.

This month Ellis, 68, published her autobiography, "From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream" (Christian Faith Publishers). She will give a talk and sign copies 6 p.m. Tuesday at McComb Library.

"I look at my life and I've had a remarkable journey coming from a small cotton farm between Magnolia and Liberty," she said in a phone interview this week. "And I thought, what better time to address the toughness of racism in the country and sexism in the country, and to talk in a positive way about those things and how those things don't need to define us.'

The first half of the book details her life in Amite County, the second half her ventures into the world beyond. The book relates the good, the bad and the ugly the good side of rural life and kind neighbors, the bad of poverty and hardship, the ugliness of racism and sex-

"I want my book to be hopeful," Ellis said. "I think it's timely today because we see gender issues and race issues commanding and controlling the airways. So I'm hopeful that my book will be a learning tool, positive, to face up to the pain of it and also make a commitment to doing better'

Ellis, the daughter of the late Stafford and Mable Scott, grew up on Europe Bates Road halfway between Liberty and Magnolia. Her paternal grandparents were Holdens. She attended Tickfaw Baptist Church and has many relatives in southwest Mississippi, where she visits periodically.

In the book, Ellis recounts some of the dramatic events from her childhood, including a black man shot to death, another castrated. and a cross burned on her father's lawn.

She also recalls the more banal incidents that provided an undercurrent of tension in daily life, such as simply going to town in Liberty or Magnolia.

"At the one-and-only Malt Stand, blacks were often harassed or ignored if they tried to place an order to go, especially on a Saturday afternoon when it was crowded with white teens," Ellis writes.

"Mother and Daddy only for a cute little blond, curly-either.





'The beautiful thing about Mississippi is that there was no pretense about race relations when I was growing up. It was all out there. That's not the same in America.'

## **Janice Ellis**

On leaving Mississippi

glanced at them as they hurried to the car out of fear of what could have resulted if they had said a word to them.

tween the races as well as street to avoid them. meanness, sometimes at the same time.

One Saturday in Magnolia, helping a white neighbor get make sure I could cut the her parents walked out of a a cow off the road that had dry cleaners and "two seven found an opening in an old or eight-year old white boys run-down barbed wire fence spit at them," Ellis writes. as a car passed slowly enough state line after she graduated,



headed five-year-old to spit and yell, 'Nigger.'"

Farther down the road, a white woman who sold Watkins products joked and laughed with a black customer.

Ellis loved the countryside, and playing in the woods and fields of her family farm sparked dreams of faraway adventures.

But when she left Amite County to attend Millsaps College, she found racism there as well, as white students refused to sit with black Ellis observed harmony be- ones and walked across the

"I helped integrate Millsaps College in Jackson," "I saw a black neighbor Ellis said. "I chose Millsaps to mustard, irrespective of my race and gender.

Racism didn't stop at the

Mississippi is that having left Magnolia and the Liberty area and going to Madison, Wis., Milwaukee, Kansas City, there was no pretense about race relations when I was growing up. It was all out there. That's not the same in Ellis encountered another

sort of discrimination as well: sexism. At the University of Wisconsin, white professors tried to discourage her from pursuing higher degrees since she was pregnant and planned to raise a family.

gree and a doctorate, and later went to work as the first black female director for a large pharmaceutical company. There she regularly received "outstanding" job performance ratings — but was always passed over for promotion to vice president.

"I hit the race and the gen-

"No matter how good you are, no matter how qualified you are, you hit that ceiling." But Ellis refuses to succumb to resentment.

"I grew up in a Christian home. My faith has sustained me through all my trials, whether they are personal or professional," she said. "I give so much credit to

my parents. Despite the oppressive indignities that they suffered, they were never bit-

## JANICE S. ELLIS FILE

- Bachelor's degree from Millsaps College, master's and doctorate from University of Wisconsin
- Executive in government agency, then at large pharmaceutical company
- President and CEO of her own marketing firm
- President and CEO of a child advocacy agency
- Written for Kansas City Star, Milwaukee Business Journal, community newspapers, radio stations, national trade publications
- Published online magazines USAonRace.com and RaceReport.com
- Writes regularly at JaniceSEllis.com

ing right, believing, and things are better," Ellis said. "I want to commend my hometown with how far we've come."

Author Janice Ellis will

give a talk and sign copies

of her book, 'From Liberty

to Magnolia: In Search of

p.m. Tuesday at McComb

nie Holden. Below left,

Janice Faye Scott in grade

school at Europe Bates

no time. If you spend your en-

ergy being bitter and being a

her home area now, she cites "the goodness of Amite

County and Pike County, the

speech at the library Tuesday,

growing up there, but also

how you just keep living, do-

That spirit will inform her

"I just want to talk about

Asked how she feels about

victim — what a waste."

School.

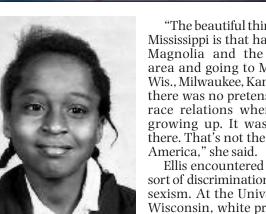
people."

she said.

In addition to the other the American Dream' at 6 challenges she faced, Ellis survived an abusive first marriage. Now she and her husband Frank own their own farm in Missouri.

"America is still challenged when it comes to race relations and gender relations," Ellis said. "As far as we have come, we still need to address racial and gender inequality.

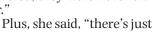
"It's not a blame game, it's not a 'woe is me' game, but we really need to be honest about our history, we need to learn about our history. Minorities and women make up the majority of the citizenry. We need to stop categorizing a whole race of people by the few, no matter what your skin color, no matter what the beauty and the growth of your gender.'

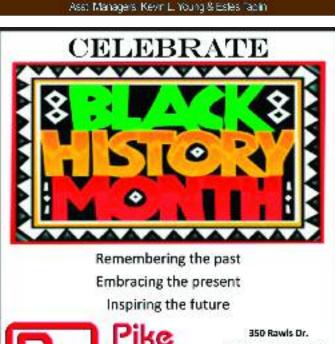


"The beautiful thing about

But she got a master's de-

der ceiling there," Ellis said.





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