

LIVING 50-PLUS

EMBRACE THE AGE, ENHANCE YOUR LIFE

One woman's courageous journey to make a difference

Janice S. Ellis PhD: 'From Liberty to Magnolia, In search of the American Dream'

Liz Johnson

Richmond News Staff Writer

Most of us over the age of 50 remember the civil rights movement, segregation and women's liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s. But, author Janice Scott Ellis PhD, who is a woman and black, grew up experiencing those years up close and personal. They made a deep impression on her as she blazed a tenacious trail of determination to succeed, break down the barriers of prejudice against gender and color, fulfill her dreams and find her purpose in life.

Ellis, grew up in southern Mississippi and now resides on a beautiful rural spot in Ray County, has written a book about her journey as a black woman fighting for racial equality as well as equality in the restricting workforce culture for women.

"The Klan burned a cross in our driveway."

JANICE SCOTT ELLIS

Her story is compelling and intriguing and reaches out to grab the heart of its reader. The book exposes the depths what Ellis has endured and what she has accomplished,

and where the journey has taken her now.

From Liberty to Magnolia

Ellis was born in the house she grew up in, one of seven children of Stafford and Mable Scott, on a farm in the southwest corner of Mississippi. Her parents' farm, located on a dirt road, was halfway between two towns, Liberty and Magnolia.

"Liberty is about what this country should be about," Ellis said, explaining the title of her book. "And magnolia – the flower – is so beautiful. My life has been a journey from Liberty's perch. I'm supposed to be able to be free and have all these inalienable rights, and I'm supposed to achieve my magnolia – whatever that is."



ABOVE: The childhood farm where Janice Scott Ellis was born and raised. In the foreground is the smokehouse and tool shed. The corn barn is in the background. **RIGHT:** Janice with Frank, her husband of more than 30 years. (Submitted photos)



Ellis said the names of the two towns were to represent freedom (liberty) and beauty (magnolia), but that "neither one really existed that way for blacks ... for what they represented."

The roads within the towns were paved, but Ellis said that as you drove between the towns, where the black families lived, the roads were dirt. Her high school was segregated. She was bussed two miles past a white school to get to a black school.

None of that deterred Ellis from her goals and dreams.

"I had good teachers, and I got an education," she said. "My parents were not formally educated. My dad finished eighth grade. Mom had a little college, but they

both stressed education to us."

Of the seven children, Ellis is the only one who received a formal education. She has two master degrees and a doctorate.

Growing up in the '60s

It wasn't easy growing up black in the south during the early days of the civil rights movement.

"The Klan burned a cross at the end of our driveway," Ellis said, adding that her father and other members of the community were active in trying to get blacks to register to vote. Her father was also a

member of the NAACP.

"My mom became so hysterical (from the cross burning)," she said. "My dad had a factory job, and in the evening at the end of his shift, his ride would drop him off on the road around 11 p.m. My brothers would go out and wait for him."

Ellis' father was also a deacon for 72 years at Tickfaw Missionary Baptist

ELLIS

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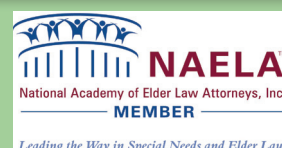
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ELLIS

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Church. The Klan burned crosses there, too.

“He took living a Christ-like life to heart,” Ellis writes in her book. “Daddy stressed common sense, kindness, humility.”

Ellis said she remembers many civil rights horrors of the ‘60s, such as when activist Medgar Evers was assassinated in his own driveway in 1963 in Jackson, Miss.

She remembers many of the deaths that occurred during those days – the three Freedom Riders who were killed in June 1964 for attempting to get blacks registered to vote – the murder of her high school boyfriend’s father, Herbert Lee, who was shot in the head by a state legislator in September 1961 when he arrived at a cotton gin with a load of cotton. Lee had been active in trying to get blacks to register to vote.

Ellis chronicles many of the events of those years that she says formulated her future, driving her to work hard and be proud of her heritage. She had two things to overcome – the color of her skin, and the fight for equality among women in the workforce.

Challenging college years

The first college Ellis attended was Tougaloo College, just north of Jackson, Miss. It was at Tougaloo where Ellis became active in the civil rights move-



ment. In 1968, Ellis left Tougaloo to attend Millsaps College in Jackson, Miss.

“I knew there weren’t many black people there,” Ellis said. “It was clear we were not welcome. In 1968, there were six of us black women at Millsaps. All of us lived in one dormitory.”

She said she and her roommate would walk down the sidewalk at the college and the white students would move off the sidewalk to avoid them.

“Those students who got off the sidewalk to avoid me at college didn’t even know me,” Ellis said. “Tradition and racist stereotypes control how we react to



FAR LEFT: Janice as a high school senior with her boyfriend, Herbert Lee Jr. Lee’s father was shot in the head and killed by a white legislator when he drove to a local cotton gin to deliver a bale of cotton. Lee Sr. had been active in trying to register blacks to vote during the early 1960s.
LEFT: Janice’s parents, Mable and Stafford Scott. (Submitted photos)

strangers, and we don’t even know who they are.”

At one point, Klan members circled the dormitory at Tougaloo, and at Millsaps to prevent black people from registering to vote.

Ellis talks openly about when she was a little girl and her parents went to the cleaners to get a dress for her mom to wear to church, and two little children spit at them.

Yet, Ellis said she does not characterize or put all white people in a bag.

“I harbor no ill feelings,” she said. “No bitterness toward anybody.”

Attending college was Ellis’ chance to take a stand. Despite growing up poor, attending segregated schools and witnessing the horrific acts of the ‘60s, she was determined to make a difference with her life.

She said her faith in God has been with her for every step of her life’s journey, lifting her up and propelling her forward.

Ellis said she loves the power of words and had a love of books early on in her life that has led her down the road to writing.

The late journalists Eric Sevareid and Walter Lippmann “solidified her belief that the wise use of words is what advances society.”

Although she loved writing, Ellis originally majored in mathematics. When she was close to graduating and had to prove a theorem in algebra, she found she needed assistance from her professor.

That would be the impetus to change the direction of her education.

“He wouldn’t look at me,” Ellis said about the

math professor. “He just held out his hand to receive the papers, wrote on them and handed them back to me. He never looked at me.”

She said she was so stunned that she knew she had to get out of that department.

“We (the blacks) were persona non grata in classes,” she said.

Ellis graduated from Millsaps with a degree in communications.

In moving on, Ellis found direction from her speech professor who encouraged her to pursue graduate school in communications and that he’d help get her into a good school.

Of the top three communication schools at the time, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Princeton and Yale, Ellis received a stipend to attend graduate school in Wisconsin.

“When I got to Wisconsin (university) during the ‘70s, there weren’t many blacks or women there,” Ellis said. There were four women in the university, and Ellis was the only black one in her graduate program.

Driven to achieve her goals, Ellis arrived in Wisconsin six months pregnant. She had married while still in Mississippi, but her husband remained behind.

Undaunted, Ellis continued to work on her degrees, raise her children and hold down a job. None of the challenges she faced kept her from moving forward to

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Slices of LIFE

Hey baby

By Jill Pertler
Special to the Richmond News



PERTLER

There are 7.5 billion people in the world. That's 75 followed by eight zeros. A billion is hard for the average mind to fathom. One billion is equivalent to a thousand millions. In other words, a really big number.

There are 7.5 billion of us living, eating and breathing here on planet earth. And although each of us is unique, we have one thing in common.

Each of us – without exception – began our journey in the same way. As newborn babies. Naked and afraid. Think about that. Let it sink in. Look around and embrace the concept.

90-year old grandfathers. Middle-aged women. 20-something men. Teenagers. Rock stars. Movie stars. Coal miners. Cab drivers. Computer scientists. Rocket scientists. The rich. The poor. Elite athletes. Good folks on the C-squad. You. Your neighbor. Your neighbor's neighbor. Everyone. All. Of. Us.

We inhabit this planet and (so far) the only way to get here is by being a baby. It's a major life experience shared by all 7.5 billion of us. Wow.

Every one of us was somebody's itty bit of a newborn. (Although teenagers definitely do not want to be reminded of this fact.)

It's likely someone waited for our arrival. A mother carried us and let her body be overcome by our girth. When space became tight we left the world we'd known for nine months to enter a new one.

We were all born helpless – completely dependent on others for our very survival. Crying was about all we had in our arsenal. We didn't have enough muscle control to hold our own head up. We couldn't roll over. We pooped our pants.

In the best scenarios we were cuddled by the grown-ups who loved us and smothered by big sisters or big brothers who just wanted a hug from the tiny baby. Some of us were the

recipients of sloppy wet kisses from the dog or kneading paws from the cat.

Our mothers and fathers and caregivers changed our diapers and kept us clean. They fed us and made sure we were growing and meeting appropriate milestones. They interpreted our cries and knew which one meant we were hungry and which indicated a need for a nap. They got up in wee hours to tend to our needs and readjust our blankets. They held us and rocked us goodnight. But for their care, we would have died.

Each of us, without exception, was a newborn and totally dependent on others for our basic needs. We all come from humble beginnings.

We aren't really cognizant of this. Of course we acknowledge the fact, but we aren't aware of it on a regular basis. We see what we see in the here and now. That's makes us human. We perceive people as older than us, younger than us and sometimes about the same age as us. But we hardly ever look at an adult and think, "I bet he was a cute baby."

We don't see others the way they (and we) came into this world: naked, crying and a little bit messy.

Maybe we should. In these times when everyone seems to focus on differences, maybe we should go back to the basics and realize there is at least one thing we have in common. Maybe we should be more aware of how we all got our start in this world.

Not a perfect solution, but perhaps it's a start.

*...
Jill Pertler is an award-winning syndicated columnist, published playwright, author and member of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Don't miss a slice; follow the Slices of Life page on Facebook.*

Living 50-Plus readers: This month, instead of both editions of Living 50-Plus running on the first and third Friday papers. This first November edition is on the first Friday and the second edition will appear in our special Thanksgiving edition newspaper, out Nov. 27.

Beware of social security scam targeting seniors

According to AARP magazine, a new social security scam is circulating the United States.

Gale Stallworth Stone, the acting inspector general of the Social Security Administration has issued a warning to citizens about a new scheme directed at seniors.

The scam involves someone posing as a SSA employee, usually calling from a 323 area code number. Sometimes the caller tells the victim he/she is due a 1.7 percent cost of living adjustment increase in their benefits.

The caller then asks the victim to verify personal information, including private information such as social security number, phone, date of birth, etc.

If you receive a suspicious call like this, contact the Office of the Inspector General at 800-269-0271.

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Could KC's next mayor be a woman?

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Maier aide leaves with questions

Women hope to curb problem of pregnancies

Aide to Maier felt passed over

At symposium

Eye on your city

afford not to vote?

mayor proposal

Esquire honors two Milwaukee women

Black Milwaukee mayor? Yes, but when?

HEALTH AND THE WORK PLACE

ON CAPITAL REGULATION



FAR LEFT: An assortment of newspaper articles written about Ellis (known as Janice Anderson before her marriage to Frank Ellis), that include: being honored by Esquire magazine, running for mayor of Kansas City; some of her own columns; and several pieces by the Milwaukee newspaper when Ellis was not promoted to budget director after drafting the cutting edge budget process being used by cities across the country. It was also speculated that Ellis might run for mayor of Milwaukee as well. LEFT: An article announcing Janice's attendance to the international symposium in Bonn, Germany, where she presented the municipal budget she drafted. ABOVE: Ellis is pictured with Alma Powell, wife of then Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was a guest speaker at a Partnership for Children event. (Submitted photos)

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obtain her masters and a doctorate in communication arts and a master's degree in political science.

The power of words: The influence of Eric Severeid & Walter Lippmann

Ellis had spent her childhood watching the news. She was 14 when Eric Severeid became a regular on the "CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite" in 1964. She had first seen Severeid reporting on the day John F. Kennedy was shot.

"I got home that night (of the shooting) and Severeid was on the evening news, and he put it in perspective," Ellis said.

She said that while Cronkite was "the Most trusted man in America," Eric Severeid was the most calming and illuminating to me.

Even through the ensuing years, college, marriage, parenting and working, Ellis had not forgotten Severeid.

"I was enamored with Eric Severeid and what he did with analyzing issues," she said.

As a teenager, she had told her mother that she was going to someday do what Severeid does. Her mother's reply was, "You're building air castles." In other words, she was daydreaming.

"I looked at her and thought about that,"

Ellis said. "That's when I began to be driven. I saw King pleading with America to do the right thing. He was nonviolent. I saw the power of words. He was the master orator."

It took Ellis seven years to finish her doctorate. She was working, going to school and raising two boys.

She received a grant to go to Yale to study all of the late journalist Walter Lippmann's original papers for her dissertation. While researching Lippmann, Ellis said she thought about Severeid, who was still alive and a contemporary of Lippmann.

"I said I don't have a chance to interview Severeid," Ellis wrote him anyway, telling Severeid how she had wanted to be the kind of journalist he was since she was a little girl.

At the time, Ellis was working at the mayor's office in Milwaukee.

Several weeks after writing Severeid, Ellis was at her desk in the Milwaukee mayor's office. Ellis was told Severeid was on the phone waiting to speak with her.

He invited her to his Chevy Chase, Md., home and talked with her for a couple of hours. Ellis told Severeid that she also wanted to interview James Reston and Marquis Childs, considered the most noted columnists of the day.

"Severeid said, 'I know Scotty (Reston), I'll give him a call for you,'" Ellis

"With your passion, you can really make a difference as a columnist."

THE LATE JOURNALIST ERIC SEVAREID
Spoken to Janice Ellis after she interviewed him

mentary time.

"When I worked for the mayor, I was the first black woman in a senior position in his office," Ellis said.

Despite her hefty education, Ellis' first job for the city was sitting in the information booth. By now, she was divorced and was raising her children. She had this job for 18 months before the mayor's office sat up and took notice. After writing some brochures for the tax office, it was suggested she apply for a vacancy in the mayor's office. She did and got the job as staff consultant to the mayor.

"It was the best eight years of my career, when it came to preparing me for everything else," she said.

Despite Ellis' degrees in communications and political science, the mayor focused on her college mathematics courses. So, Ellis went to the budget hearings, wrote his speeches and helped with the budget message. The mayor asked her to research everything about municipal budgeting and come up with ways to make the budget better. Two years later, she conducted a pilot run on a combination of performance-based and zero-based budgeting.

"It got national attention with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the National League of Cities adopted the model," she said.

The budget system was printed and

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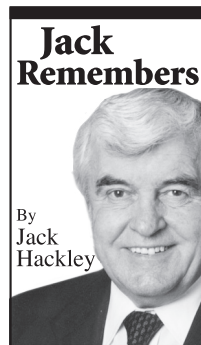
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The Beverly Hillbillies: A local connection

A recent book release written thirty years ago by Ruth Henning, wife of Paul Henning, creator of "The Beverly Hillbillies," has put the Beverly Hillbillies and Paul Henning locally in the news.



Jack Remembers

By Jack Hackley

When the Beverly Hillbillies show first appeared on television, the critics lambasted it, saying it wouldn't last a year. Variety Magazine said it was painful to sit through, and said that if television was America's wasteland, "The Beverly Hillbillies" must be Death Valley. By the third show, it was number one on TV and stayed there. It ran for nine years.

My mother's family was close to the Hennings, who lived north of Bates City. Consequently, I have always been a fan of Paul Henning. I believe he is one of the most brilliant people to ever be born in Lafayette County.

The internet and most references say Paul Henning was born in Independence. Not true. Paul was born on a farm west of Concordia, near where the trucker's rest stop is on I-70. The Henning's came from Germany and settled in the Concordia area. Paul's

grandfather gave Paul's father, William Henning, the farm where Paul was born. His father wasn't a very good farmer, and his mother took all the children including Paul, who was the youngest, and bought a boarding house in Independence. Paul's father William, remained on the farm in Concordia.

I am sure of one thing. Had Paul remained in Lafayette County, he would not have been known as Paul, but would have had a nickname. An older brother was a famous Indianapolis 500 race car mechanic and owner, and had the nickname "Cotton." Another older brother involved in the automobile industry was called "Major." Paul's Uncle Henry Henning settled north of Bates City, owned a large farm, and had seven sons, who were Paul's cousins, all with nicknames: Brush, Shorty, Cotton, Broad, Pegleg and Humpy Henning. The seventh son was named Ed and I am not sure of his nickname.

...
Jack can be reached at PO Box 40, Oak Grove, MO 64075 or jackremembers@aol.com. Visit www.jackremembers.com.

Editor's note: Six weeks after its debut in 1962, *The Beverly Hillbillies* was the most watched program on TV. Between 1962 and 1964, average viewership was 57 million. (MeTV)



Paul Henning, left, a native of Concordia, authored the hit TV show "The Beverly Hillbillies." The cast featured, front row from left: Irene Ryan as Granny, Max Baer Jr. as Jethro and Donna Douglas as Elly May. Back row: Veteran actor Buddy Ebsen as Jed Clampett, Nancy Culp as Miss Jane and Raymond Bailey as Milburn Drysdale.

LIBERTY

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distributed to municipalities with populations of 30,000 and higher.

Ellis was then invited to attend a municipal budgeting symposium in Bonn, Germany, with a contingent of mayors from the United States. Her boss asked her to present the budget system she had drafted.

Despite her successes, education and skills, Ellis did not get promoted at the mayor's office even after the budget director retired.

"No matter how good I was, no matter how hard I worked - I (also) worked for a healthcare company, and I raised their revenues verifiably into the millions of dollars - but they never gave me the credit for it," Ellis said.

She added that each job prepared her for the next step in her life.

"If it weren't for my faith, I would be insane or dead," she said. "Each experience, even though the outcome may have been painful, I learned from it. I became stronger because of it ... it kept me moving."

Ellis said she never took a job for the money, but she has persevered and suc-

ceeded with each job she's had.

"I'm not going to take a job I don't think I can do or a job that I can't make better," she said. "I know I did a great job even if I didn't get promoted."

Ellis was also president and CEO of Partnership for Children from 2000 to 2006 where she advocated for children and early education funding.

Before she was 40 years old, Ellis said Esquire magazine had selected her as one of those under 40 who was changing the nation.

She was and continues to be a trailblazer.

Along the line, Ellis had divorced her first husband and finally met the man who was to become the love of her life, Frank Ellis. They married, and she moved with him to Kansas City.

Writing in Kansas City

Ellis also achieved her original dream to be a writer. After moving to Missouri, she wrote for *The Kansas City Globe* for 11 years, and for *The Kansas City Call* for a few years.

Then Ellis ran for mayor twice and did pretty well, though she didn't win either election. *The Kansas City Star* then invited her to write an op-ed column for them,

which she did for 4 1/2 years.

In 2008, Ellis launched a magazine about race relations. The idea was to have an educational magazine that could be inserted into major newspapers. She was able to successfully get the magazine into 11 newspapers around the U.S.

Unfortunately, the larger newspapers began losing business and shaving down their circulation, contributions and coverage.

"It was the most traumatic professional experience of my career," Ellis said of her magazine being pulled from distribution, even though it was the nature of the decline of some newspapers at the time.

"It took me a while to understand."

Today, tomorrow, there's more in store

Ellis' book details what it was like growing up in Mississippi and the values her parents instilled in her and her siblings.

"They did a phenomenal job with the seven of us," she said. "They had their own land, my parents. It was instilled in us - don't sell your land."

Needless to say, Ellis' family land remains in the hands of the family. Her parents have now passed on, her father at 95 and her mother at 101. Both spent their

last years enjoying the huge, homey magnolia of beauty Janice and her husband call home.

She and her husband spend their days enjoying their property, the animals, working their garden and reading their Bibles every morning.

But this woman, who has forged a trail of proving that being black and being a woman was not going to hold her back, has continued her quest.

Ellis has a website, janicesellis.com where she continues to write about the issues of today and is awaiting the release of her book "From Liberty to Magnolia, In Search of the American Dream."

Currently, advanced reading copies of the book are being sent to national newspapers and magazines for reviews and articles. Ellis will likely secure radio interviews and TV appearances. The book is expected to be released and available for sale sometime in late January. Look for a follow-up in the *Richmond News* on the book's release, book signings and local events at that time.

To receive updates about the book's release, reviews, appearances and book signings, sign up at janicesellis.com/newsletter-sign-up/.

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