

People often ask,
“Why did you decide to write your mother’s story,
“Bullets in the Fire-The Saga of New York Red”
and tell it in her own voice?”

In one word “justice.” Erma Louise Hill was attacked and killed by a Mafia hit-man as she escorted her four-year-old daughter home from daycare. She was killed because she refused to turn over her Harlem lucrative number business to the mob. Her assassin was never apprehended.

Over my adult years I have come to realize what an exceptional woman of African descent she was. But American history is bursting with exceptional women; but not like this one. Erma figured out early in life how to take on the world and succeed. She was a math whiz, a street fighter and yet the most caring person in the world. She made her own rules, she lived by them and she died by them. I believe her story of from poverty to prosperity can inspire other single women in similar situations to pull themselves up and over barriers that are placed in their way.

Her story starts in 1924 in Plains, Georgia. It was the same year President Jimmy Carter was born there. Our family actually worked for the Carter family from time to time. Her intellect surfaced very early in her school career. Erma was not like the rest. She excelled in school and her caring heart drove her to help others along the way. This concern for others was evident throughout her life.

The depression made sure every member of any black household had to work in the cotton and peanut fields to eke-out every penny of income to keep from starving. Working on the edge of the law in the family’s bootlegging business taught Erma early how to earn by making her own rules. She knew she had to work

hard if she was to make it out of Plains, Georgia and she also had to fight off white rapists who thought black women were easy pickings.

With a undaunting spirit derived from a family line of strong Black women, she refused to be coerced into allowing herself to fall victim to a sexist, racist south. Being an attractive woman, she defended her right to pick and choose whom she wanted to have relationships with and under what circumstances. She learned early how to confront abuse even if it came from home. She dealt with these situations smartly and forcefully, whether you agreed with her methods or not.

Known on the streets of Harlem as New York Red, this story of a courageous mother who clawed her way out of poverty to become the celebrated Harlem Number Banker must be told in her own voice. Her life changing message of intellect, strength and financial independence must be communicated to all single mothers wishing to find their way out of the pits of poverty. This will be her justice.

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