

MEDIA PRESS KIT

Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos

The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill

By Francene Mary Diane Hill

2026 MEDIA EDITION



A story of wartime service, Black entrepreneurship,
family, education, and a six-decade St. Louis legacy.

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At a Glance

From guarding World War II secrets at the Pentagon, to founding the Tiny Tot Nursery School of St. Louis, Inc., Kermit B. Hill—a trailblazing African American entrepreneur—built an institution that served her community for over 60 years. In this intimate biography, her daughter, Francene Mary Diane Hill, reconstructs her mother's legacy through an extraordinary archive of love letters, War Department files, news clippings, photographs, and her own firsthand experience growing up inside the Tiny Tot empire.



She Guarded Wartime Secrets at the Pentagon—Then Built a 60-Year Legacy

Why This Story Matters

- An overlooked story of a Black woman business owner and community leader before the Civil Rights era.
- A remarkable career arc spanning probation work, wartime government service, entrepreneurship, and education.
- A six-decade St. Louis institution centered on children's confidence, leadership, public speaking, culture, and performance.
- A daughter's intimate reconstruction of her mother's life using primary-source family and historical materials.
- A visually rich historical story supported by photographs, handwritten letters, War Department files, and newspaper coverage.

Secondary Media Angles

- 80 love letters: what private correspondence reveals about the woman behind the public legacy.
- Black women in business and education before the Civil Rights era.
- The preservation of family and community history through primary sources.
- How early performing arts experiences can cultivate confidence and leadership.
- The story of Tiny Tot Nursery School and its Royal King and Queen Coronations, preschool graduations, fashion shows, and community performances.

2026 Media Story

FOR MEDIA USE

She Guarded World War II Secrets at the Pentagon— Then Built a 60-Year Legacy



New biography preserves the life of Kermit B. Hill, an overlooked Black woman entrepreneur whose Tiny Tot Nursery School empowered generations of children through education, culture, and performance.

SILVER SPRING, MD — 2026 — Long before the Civil Rights era, Kermit B. Hill built a life that crossed government service, entrepreneurship, education, and community leadership. In *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos: The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill*, her daughter Francene Mary Diane Hill brings that largely overlooked story to a wider audience.



Kermit's path was anything but conventional. Her career included work as a probation officer in Arkansas and guarding wartime secrets at the Pentagon before she established the Tiny Tot Nursery School of St. Louis, Inc. in 1951. The school became a six-decade institution in the St. Louis community, combining early education with public speaking, leadership development, cultural pride, and the performing arts.

One of the book's most distinctive elements is the archive behind the story. Author Francene draws on 80 personal love letters, hundreds of photographs, original War Department files, and more than 100 news clippings to reconstruct her mother's life and place it within the broader history of 20th-century Black America.

At Tiny Tot, children did more than attend preschool. Royal King and Queen Coronations, Cap and Gown Graduations, Fashion Shows, and creative performances gave young children opportunities to practice confidence, leadership, and public speaking. The coronations were designed around the idea of creating a world where young Black children could see themselves as kings and queens.

"I grew up knowing my mother through the life she built at Tiny Tot, but the deeper I went into her letters, photographs, files, and newspaper stories, the more I understood the remarkable life that came before and behind that institution," says Francene Mary Diane Hill, author and Kermit B. Hill's daughter.



Kirkus Reviews describes the book as “an accessible, valuable addition to the histories of Black businesswomen in America.”

Today, *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos* offers journalists, historians, educators, book clubs, and general readers an entry point into the life of a woman whose work connected public service, family, entrepreneurship, education, and Black community life across generations.

Media Opportunities

Francene Mary Diane Hill is available for interviews, podcasts, book-club conversations, author panels, speaking engagements, and community/history events as schedule permits.

About the Book

Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos

The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill

Book Description

Before the Civil Rights era, Kermit B. Hill defied racial and gender barriers to become a pioneering entrepreneur and community leader. From her early work as a probation officer in Arkansas, to guarding wartime secrets at the

Pentagon, and ultimately founding the Tiny Tot Nursery School of St. Louis, Inc., Kermit built an institution that empowered children and transformed a community for more than 60 years. Through Royal King and Queen Coronations, Cap and Gown Graduations, Fashion Shows, and creative performances, preschoolers gained confidence, leadership, and public speaking skills. Told by her daughter, Francene Mary Diane Hill, the book blends intimate family history with researched historical narrative.

Drawing on 80 personal love letters, hundreds of photographs, original War Department files, and more than 100 news clippings, *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos* creates an authentic portrait of a woman whose life intersects with Black history, women's entrepreneurship, education, family, and community.

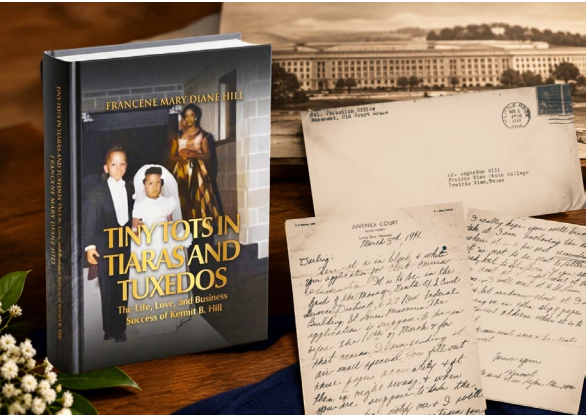
Kirkus Reviews

“An accessible, valuable addition to the histories of Black businesswomen in America.”

Kirkus Reviews also describes the work as “an engaging” book that “often reads like a novel,” placing one woman’s life within the larger context of 20th-century Black history.

Publication Details

Title	Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos
Subtitle	The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill
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About the Author

Francene Mary Diane Hill

Francene Mary Diane Hill is the daughter of Kermit Hill, founder of the Tiny Tot Nursery School in St. Louis, Missouri, and Augustus H. Hill, Sr. She holds a B.A. in Psychology from Smith College and an M.S. in Human and Family Studies from Penn State University.

Francene grew up surrounded by the energy and purpose of Tiny Tot and worked in every role at the school— from

teacher’s assistant to bus driver—before serving as a Board Member and Assistant Director. Her firsthand experience gives her a unique perspective on the institution and the woman who created it. Her storytelling has taken her to open mics, book readings, book festivals, and The Moth StorySLAM in Washington, DC. She has been featured in Sisters of AARP Magazine, the St. Louis Public Library’s Digital Collection, and other media and community platforms.



Author Interview Topics

- Why Kermit B. Hill’s story belongs in the history of Black women entrepreneurs.
- How a woman who guarded wartime secrets at the Pentagon became a St. Louis education entrepreneur.
- What 80 love letters reveal about a woman’s private life and public ambition.
- Preserving family history through photographs, government files, letters, and newspaper archives.
- The educational philosophy behind Tiny Tot’s coronations, graduations, fashion shows, and performances.
- How growing up inside Tiny Tot shaped Francene’s understanding of her mother.
- Race, gender, opportunity, and entrepreneurship in mid-20th-century America.
- Lessons today’s educators, parents, and community leaders can draw from Kermit’s example.

Suggested Interview Questions

1. What inspired you to write your mother’s story?
2. When did you realize that your mother’s life was part of a much larger historical story?
3. What did you discover in the 80 love letters that surprised you?
4. What did the War Department files add to your understanding of your mother?
5. Why were the King and Queen Coronations important to Kermit and the children?
6. How did working at Tiny Tot affect your own life and career?
7. What does Kermit’s story tell us about Black women entrepreneurs before the Civil Rights era?
8. What do you hope readers carry with them after finishing the book?

Media Coverage

Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos and author, Francene Mary Diane Hill have been featured across print, radio, literary and community media.



May 1, 2026 - St. Louis, MO

Author Francene Hill shares her inspiring story on Foxy 106.9's "Voice of St. Louis" with Michael Roberts, Jr. *The Life and Legacy of Kermit B. Hill*

Author Francene Mary Diane Hill joined Foxy 106.9's "Voice of St. Louis" with Michael Roberts, Jr. to discuss her new book, *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos: The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill* and the incredible story of her mother, Kermit B. Hill.

Kermit started Tiny Tot Nursery School in 1951, which served generations of children for 60 years through Royal Coronations, preschool graduations, and Tom Thumb Weddings.

Francene invited the listening audience to her upcoming "Meet Me in St. Louis" Book Tour, stopping at Subterranean Books, Ladue Barnes & Noble, and St. Louis Central Library.



Foxy 106.9 Voice of St. Louis

Author Radio Interview

May 1, 2026



Tiny Tot Legacy Reclaimed: Book Tour and Reunion Honor a St. Louis Pioneer

by ArgusStaff — April 3, 2026 In Community, Education, Event



ST. LOUIS — A defining chapter of Black St. Louis history is stepping back into the spotlight. More than seven decades after a small notice appeared in the St. Louis Argus announcing the opening of The Tiny Tot Day Nursery, the legacy of its founder, Kermit B. Hill, is being revived through a new book and community celebration.

The "Meet Me in St. Louis" Book Tour marks the release of *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos: The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill*, a biography that captures the remarkable journey of a woman whose life bridged wartime service and community transformation. The tour not only introduces readers to Hill's story but reconnects generations shaped by her vision. Before becoming a cornerstone of early childhood education in St. Louis, Hill served at the Pentagon during World War II, entrusted with safeguarding sensitive information at a time when opportunities for Black women in such roles were rare. Her transition from federal service to entrepreneurship would prove equally impactful. In 1951, she founded the Tiny Tot Nursery

St. Louis Argus Newspaper

Book/Author Coverage

April 3, 2026

What's Inside...
Your Community Newspaper
• Housing trends hot topic in county, includes interview with local expert (Page 1)
• Back your calendar: Long list of meetings on this month's agenda (Page 1)
• Sports: The cold weather, now is the time to start planning your garden (Page 1)
• February: A list of events, arts and entertainment (Page 12-13)
• Several key basketball games with local teams (Page 14)

The Greater Olney News

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[Vol. 10, No. 16] • Circulation Over 19,000 • February 5, 2025

Local writers to discuss themes of Black history, business, resilience

by Audrey Parfitt
Contributing Writer

Tyler has always been stronger than fiction. Such was the case when local authors Francene Hill and Linda Moore met through the Olney Writers' Group and discovered a family connection.

The Silver Spring residents realized that their mothers had been friends in high school in Little Rock, Ark., and Hill's mother was Moore's grandmother. Though the families lost touch, it was Hill's mother's unusual name, "Kermit," which led Moore to connect the dots.

Kermit Bland Hill is the subject of her daughter's new book, "Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos," a biography of a pioneering African American woman, who started a daycare center (Tiny Tot Nursery School), at the start of the post-war Baby Boom.

Launched in her St. Louis, Mo., home in 1951, the successful business expanded to multiple locations over the next 60 years. When it closed in 2011, it was worth the equivalent of nearly \$2.5 million in today's dollars.

Hill and Moore will both discuss and read excerpts from their work at Olney Library at 2 p.m. Feb. 9.

The event, titled "African American Family" (Continued on page 15)



Francene Hill will discuss her work, "Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos," a biography of a pioneering African American woman, during an author discussion at Olney Library on Feb. 9.

Linda Moore will discuss her poetry collection, "Searching for Resilience," which soon will be published as a chapbook (small printed booklet).

November 3, 2023

A Fat Folder of Family Secrets: Mom's Hidden Past

I've always been proud of my father's WWII service. Why didn't my mother reveal her wartime work?

By Francene Hill



Courtesy of Francene Hill

On June 20, 1942, a twenty-two-year-old African American woman in Washington, DC, raised her right hand and solemnly swore to defend the U.S. Constitution against all foreign and domestic enemies. Fresh off a segregated train from Little Rock, Arkansas, she affirmed that she had no affiliation with any political party or organization promoting the overthrow of the government by force or violence. As part of her oath of office at the War Department during World War II, she promised not to reveal confidential documents to any unauthorized person. It was only last year that a genealogy search revealed that this remarkable woman was my own mother.

The Greater Olney News

Front Page Author Feature

February 5, 2025

Sisters of AARP Magazine

Author Feature Story

November 3, 2023

Additional Media Coverage

		
The Moth StorySLAM <i>Author Storytelling Appearance</i> July 10, 2023	WSIE 88.7 The Sound <i>Author Radio Interview</i> April 21, 2026	St. Louis Public Library <i>Tiny Tot School Digital Collection</i> Ongoing

Reader Praise

“Your descriptions of objects enhance the narrative. I am able to see the setting, as well as the characters, and can intuit the feelings among the characters.”

— Linda Moore, *Reaching for Resilience*

“Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos offers a captivating portrait of Kermit B. Hill, an African American pioneer whose post-World War II journey blends public service, resilience, and entrepreneurial determination.”

— W.T. Door

“I find your ways of expression and narration exceedingly personal, warm and even intimate.”

— William Y.

“Your story Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos captured me from the very beginning.”

— Amy Chan Zhou, author of *Flowing with the Pearl River*

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Book Facebook: TinyTotsinTiarasandTuxedos

Media & Event Availability

Francene Mary Diane Hill is available for interviews, podcasts, radio and television segments, book-club conversations, author panels, speaking engagements, historical programs, and community events as schedule permits.