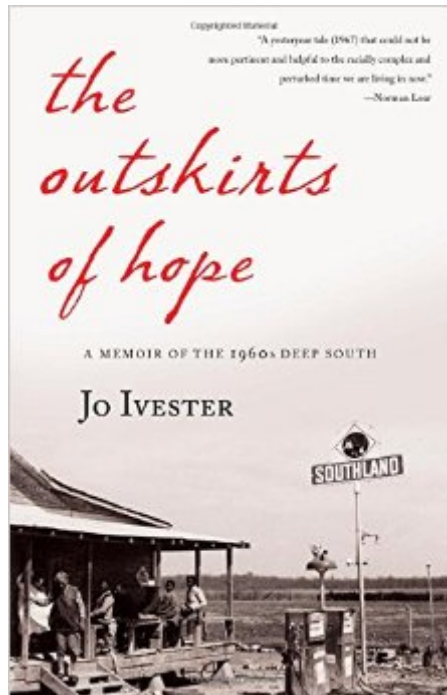


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The Outskirts Of Hope: A Memoir Of The 1960s Deep South



Synopsis

In 1967, when Jo Ivester was ten years old, her father transplanted his young family from a suburb of Boston to a small town in the heart of the Mississippi cotton fields, where he became the medical director of a clinic that served the poor population for miles around. But ultimately it was not Ivester's father but her mother—a stay-at-home mother of four who became a high school English teacher when the family moved to the South—who made the most enduring mark on the town. In *The Outskirts of Hope*, Ivester uses journals left by her mother, as well as writings of her own, to paint a vivid, moving, and inspiring portrait of her family's experiences living and working in an all-black town during the height of the civil rights movement.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a compelling, true story of an ordinary family who spends two years in extraordinary circumstances. It tells a captivating, honest tale of a white family in an all black town in the height of the civil rights movement. It is full of tenderness, love, drama and goosebumps. The family, often ignorant of the dangers facing their neighbors from the KKK, through sheer passion for helping others, develops a deep love for the community, which is reciprocated in kind. Until something happens, and they are forced to leave. Full disclosure: Aura and Leon were my Great Aunt And Uncle, and while I knew and loved them both, the familial relations are not my reason for the 5 star review. I found the book a page-turner. It is full of daily simple acts of kindness and tenderness and the not-so-subtle horrors of discrimination. Aura is a delightfully flawed character beginning her

journey as an honored educator. And the simple, innocent interjections from a 10-year-old Jo, bring goosebumps. Read this.

I picked up the *Outskirts of Hope* in my local bookstore because the author is a local, and I'm also really interested in the Civil Rights era, the period during which most of this memoir takes place. As I read the book, it was really hard to not put myself in the place of Aura, the woman whose life is uprooted in 1967 (along with the rest of her family) from a comfortable Boston existence and transferred to a tiny town in the Mississippi Delta so her husband can start a medical clinic. I'm the age Aura was when the story starts, and I also have a child (Aura's young daughter Jo is also a compelling voice in this memoir, and it's Jo's experience that ends up the linchpin of the story, both bringing their time in MS to a climax, and then providing its coda 40 years later). While the culture shock Aura experiences is constantly interesting to read about, what ends up coming through is how she turns an entirely unpredicted and, at first unwanted, life change into a catalyst for her own new paths in life. She enters Mississippi as a dutiful yet reluctant wife and by the time she leaves...well, I won't spoil it. Suffice to say, there are places in life, both literal and metaphorical, you can never go back to once your eyes are opened.

I am always skeptical of books by white people about the Civil Rights Movement. It feels like every white person who did anything has to write a book in which they're the hero. But this book almost immediately made me put down my attitude, because Aura is such an authentic and reluctant "heroine." I really loved the Aura portions of the book. Jo is a less accessible character, I think partly because of her age - 10 to 12. At first, the sections written in her voice are very short and more or less factual - I went to school, I played with my friends. It's hard to know what she is feeling about moving so far away, to someplace completely different from what she knew. She comes alive later in the book, but I never felt as connected with her as with Aura. I found myself being furious at Leon and the sexism that seems very much taken for granted, which of course, it was at that time. He not only decided what the family was going to do without consulting his wife, but he made no effort to prepare her for what it would be like. At the beginning of their journey south, she desperately has to pee and the car pulls up to a gas station rest room, someone tells her not to go in but not why, and later everyone is ragging on her for using a segregated bathroom. But why did they stop, if they didn't want her to go in, and why didn't they explain to her what it would mean? However, that incident, and others like it, are very vividly used throughout the book to make Aura's character and her journey come alive. I felt invested in the saga of the family and also enjoyed the small reflections

on how the South was changing over those few years. The scenes after Dr. King's murder had tears streaming down my face. Very simply and honestly told.

This book has the pacing and narrative flow of a novel. The structure is also compelling - the author has crafted the memoir from her mother's diary entries, and interspersed some of her own as well. I was immediately captivated by the characters and by their story. Not only is this a wonderfully drawn human portrait of a family that uproots from a middle class to a poor, and from all white to all black, community, with all the adjustments needed - it's also adroitly told social history. Without any preachiness or lecturing, we are given a lesson about race relations in the 60s and now, and about the impact a single person can have on society. The author does a near-impossible thing: She gives us a beautiful homage to mother as both a "real" and flawed human being, but also a woman of extraordinary courage and commitment.

I picked up Jo Ivester's memoir because of a familial connection. I was once married to her first cousin and knew, in the vaguest of terms, about her time in Mississippi. I'm not sure what I expected to find as I started to read this wonderful book, but it is no magnolia-scented remembrance of days past. In "The Outskirts of Hope," Jo manages to pull off a remarkable feat. Not only has she written a loving tribute to her mother, Aura; she has delivered a visceral reminder of the brutality and terror of life for African-Americans in the Jim Crow South. The story of the Kruger family's two years in an all-black town (surrounded by "neighbors" that hated its very existence) is at once deeply personal, and highly political. Funny. Enraging. Unflinchingly honest. And a darn good read. Its appearance -- given all the violence against African-Americans that's been in the news lately -- couldn't be more timely. By bringing to life such a terrible time, Jo Ivester reminds us of the truth of Faulkner's famous line, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past." Gini Kramer (proud to have once been able to call Aura Kruger "Aunti Aura")

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