



## **"The Hillsboro Story" - Civil rights drama comes to Southern State**

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"On a hot summer night—July 5, 1954—Lincoln School, the "colored" elementary school in Hillsboro, Ohio, went up in flames, and my sweet, sleepy, segregated little hometown was suddenly awake..."

So writes author-performer Susan Banyas, a third grader in 1954 and witness to the powerful civil rights drama unfolding around her.

Banyas will bring a theatrical performance of "The Hillsboro Story" back to its namesake town 7 p.m. Friday, April 2, in the Edward K. Daniels Auditorium on Southern State Community College's Central Campus, 100 Hobart Drive, Hillsboro. The show is free and open to the public.

The story opens on July 5, 1954, when the "colored" elementary school went up in flames. The county engineer, a white man determined to force integration, struck the match on that hot summer night that sent him to the state penitentiary (and into the FBI files) and sparked five African-American mothers to stage a two-year protest.

This local event became the first test case for *Brown v. Board of Education* (the May 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision which banned school segregation) in the North.

Banyas was in the third grade at the time, and her memory of those events sparked this cultural detective story—a lively weaving of spoken word, movement, monologues and visual images, backed by an evocative original music score. The show will be performed by Banyas and professional actors LaVerne Green, Paige Jones and Jennifer Lanier.

"I was in the third grade, absorbing the cultural commotion, which was quickly and quietly thrown into the dump heap of history and reduced to two one-liners: 'The negro women were trouble-makers' and 'The county engineer was crazy,'" said Banyas.

The work was written as a sequel to "No Strangers Here Today," a local story of the Underground Railroad movement. Both works are set in Highland County, Ohio, 100 years apart, and celebrate bi-racial resistance movements that are core to maintaining democracy and upholding human rights. Southern State Community College hosted a performance of "No Strangers Here Today" in February 2009.

"Fifty years after seeing the Marching Mothers outside Mrs. Mallory's classroom window, I went back to my hometown to find them," said Banyas. "The investigation is informed by historical research, photography and extensive interviews with key players locally and nationally, whose voices form the heart of the story."

Voices in the story—sometimes identified, sometimes not—come from multiple interviews and include Elsie Steward Young (marching mother), Gertrude Clemons Hudson (marching mother), Imogene Curtis (ringleader of the marching mothers), Eleanor Curtis Cumberland (Imogene's daughter), Doris Cumberland Woods (classmate after integration), Lewis Goins (classmate after integration), Philip Partridge (engineer, from his memoir), Tom Partridge (Philip's son), the Honorable Constance Baker Motley (attorney for the mothers), John Banyas (Susan Banyas' father and Hillsboro businessman), Lenora Gordon (Susan's friend Connie's mother), Mrs. Mallory (reading "Charlotte's Web"), Wesley C. "Junior" Burns (Imogene Curtis' cousin), Judge Richard Davis (county prosecutor), James Hapner (attorney for the board of education), Mary Hackney (Quaker teacher), Thurgood Marshall (from his opinion in the Brown v. Board of Education case), Mississippi Senator James Eastland (from speech), Rosa Parks (from "Rose Parks, a Life" by Douglas Brinkley) and Judge Potter Stewart (from his opinion in Clemons v. Board of Education/Hillsboro, Ohio).

"The Hillsboro Story" was selected as the Artists Repertory Theater's entry in Oregon's Fertile Ground new performance works festival in January 2010, and will be produced by ART for the 2010-11 season. The show will tour the Pacific Northwest and Ohio regions.

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