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MY SECRET LIFE IN FILM: A MEMOIR

By Kelly Grey Carlisle

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Jonis Agee

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2011

# MY SECRET LIFE IN FILM: A MEMOIR

Kelly Grey Carlisle, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Adviser: Jonis Agee

This creative dissertation is an original work in the genre of memoir, and consists of the first two sections of my book, *My Secret Life in Film*. I believe that my book speaks to contemporary experiences of childhood, violence, sexuality, and faith, and complicates conceptions of a 'normal' family. When I was three weeks old, my mother, who worked as a prostitute, was murdered near downtown Los Angeles. Her case remains unsolved, and I do not know my father. Her own parents were unwed. At first I lived with my maternal grandmother and the woman I believe to have been her partner. My grandmother died when I was four years old, and I was taken to live with my maternal grandfather, the larger-than-life owner of an adult video store, and his second wife, Marilyn. When I was twelve years old, our family moved on board an 85-foot wooden boat docked in an industrial section of the L.A. Harbor. The narrative concerns these childhood events, as well as my reinvestigation as an adult of my mother's case, my reunion with lost relatives, the search for my grandfather's true identity, and my own development as an adult. I attempt to highlight the reverberations of loss through the generations of my family, as well as its legacy of love and abandonment, deception and redemption. Stylistically, I have chosen a straightforward, traditional narrative in order to balance the eccentricities of my story. I, do, however, move back and forth in time in order to show the way past events resonate in the present.