Retired Bodyguard, Private Investigator and Author Maureen Hughes Recently Featured on Close Up Radio



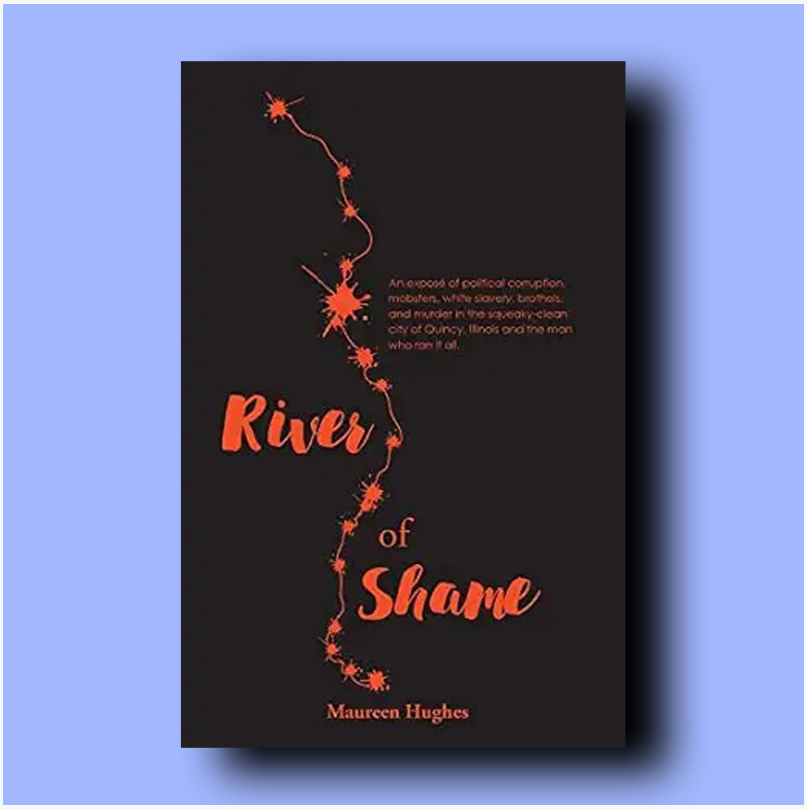
RANTOUL, IL, UNITED STATES, October 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A stranger sat down next to Maureen Hughes on a park bench and told her there was more to a story than she knew. That conversation led to a two-hour dinner, then years of digging into organized crime figures and the murders and secrets they had buried. Decades later, Hughes has built a career and body of published from one instinct: sensing when something has been masked rather than explained, and refusing to look away until she knows why.

Hughes has spent decades turning firsthand encounters with organized crime figures, forgotten murders and buried history into published work grounded in her own reporting, interviews and, at times, considerable personal risk.

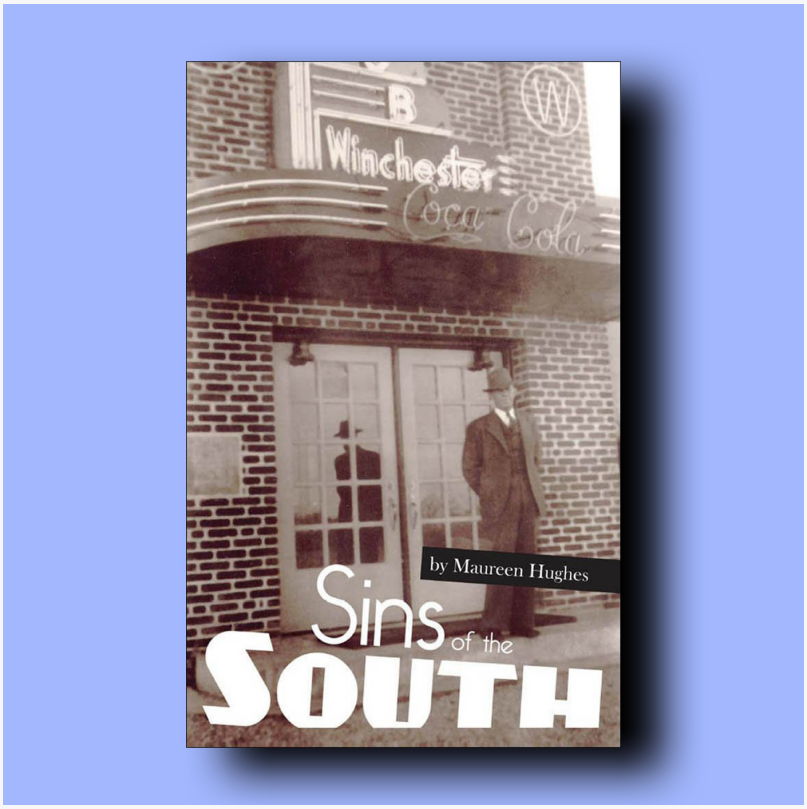
Her fascination with one story began at an art museum. Hughes had already met the woman she calls the Countess in a hospital room years earlier. At the art museum, watching the Countess hold court, gowned and gracious, greeting university presidents by name, Hughes sensed something underneath the performance. That instinct led her to the park bench conversation and the dinner that followed, where a stranger told her the Countess had once been married to mob associate Johnny Roselli. What followed was years of research into a woman who, Hughes came to believe, had her own husband killed in Rome. Out of fear and guilt, the Countess spent the rest of her life recording every room in her house.

That investigation culminated in Hughes' first book, "The Countess and the Mob"

That same appetite for uncomfortable truth carried into “River of Shame,” Hughes’ account of Ted Crawley, a Quincy, Illinois, mob figure. In “River of Shame,” Hughes explains that Crawley recruited a young, poor and uneducated James Earl Ray to run errands tied to his gambling operation, long before Ray was convicted of killing Martin Luther King Jr.



Hughes turned to a different kind of injustice in “A Fire Still Burns,” which tells the story of the so called Slave House in southern Illinois. The Slave House stop was falsely promised as part of the Underground Railroad; instead, enslaved people were who fell for the ruse were sent back south. Hughes toured the building’s third floor herself and later tracked down a woman whose great great aunt had been sold there, sale bill and all. A state superintendent of schools wrote to Hughes after reading the book and told her he had cried on a flight while finishing it.



Not every project began with tragedy. Hughes drew on her own police work for “The Skin Game,” her only work of fiction, built around a Chicago private investigator named Samantha O’Malley. Hughes says the character is about 95 percent her, down to a mission where she posed as a decoy at a mafia sit down staffed entirely by undercover FBI agents.

Her most dangerous reporting centered on Cairo, Illinois, where a state representative asked her to reopen his father’s death, which had long been ruled a suicide. Hughes says she proved the representative’s father was murdered, tracked down a second weapon from a source in Florida. The next morning, she watched the news report showing the burning building where that gun

was supposedly hidden.

Throughout her career, she has never stayed in the same motel two nights running.



Indeed, her work has come at a cost. After testifying in a high-profile mob case, she was later found by people who wanted her silenced. That's when she had to leave Illinois for her own safety. She keeps a photo of Frank Serpico, the former New York police officer whose own whistleblowing nearly got him killed. Hughes explains, "He was only trying to be a good, decent cop. But he found out some things, very much like I did. And his life was threatened. He had to leave the country. Thank God I haven't had to leave the country—yet."

Hughes credits two early supervisors with teaching her the discipline that shaped her reporting. She credits her Protestantism faith and her farm upbringing with teaching her what work sometimes threatens to take away. She raised two sons and a daughter while keeping her investigative life separate from her family life, a boundary she says was never easy to hold.

Asked whether she wishes she could forget what she has learned, Hughes says no. The knowledge, however difficult, gave her a clear picture of how power actually operates and of what silence protects.

About Maureen Hughes

Maureen Hughes is an investigative journalist and author whose books draw on years of investigation and decades of firsthand reporting on organized crime and overlooked American history. Her published works include:

- "The Countess and the Mob," a nonfiction account of a mob associated socialite's hidden past.
- In "River of Shame," Hughes asks if James Earl Ray was a patsy for Martin Luther King's Jr.'s real killer.
- "Sins of the South" exposes a mafia connection in small southern Illinois communities.
- "The Skin Game," Hughes' first work of historical fiction, is a powerful story that will keep you wondering "who did it" to the final page.

Hughes has testified in federal organized crime proceedings and continues to write from her home in Illinois.

Close Up Radio featured Maureen Hughes, retired bodyguard, private investigator and author, in an interview with Jim Masters on Wednesday September 30th at 3pm Eastern

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