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ANGUISHED KERIK BARES HIS DEMONS

Commish haunted by family tragedy

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As top cop Bernard Kerik announced plans yesterday to step down as the public face of the NYPD, a series of deeply private revelations emerged from a new memoir he has written and an upcoming TV interview.

In a segment set to air tomorrow on "60 Minutes," a tearful Kerik, 46, tells of discovering recently that his mother was a prostitute who abandoned him at age 4, leaving him with a lifetime of nightmares.

The commissioner discloses in a memoir due out next week, "The Lost Son," that he fathered an illegitimate child as a serviceman in South Korea in 1975 — a family he later walked out on.

"It occurs to me now that our lives circle back and that the patterns can be relentless and downright cruel," Kerik writes in the book, linking the two broken homes. "A boy with nightmares of being abandoned by his mother grows into a man who re-creates the nightmare without a remote understanding of why.

"Even now," he added, "these are difficult things for me to admit. Here I was, doing to an innocent child something very like what had been done to me."

The revelations came to light on a highly emotional day for Kerik, who announced yesterday that he would leave his post after Mayor Giuliani hands over the reins in January to Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg.

"I love the department," said Kerik, who hinted as far back as August that he would follow Giuliani out the door. "I love the people who work here."

The personal disclosures seemed unconnected to his departure, although the timing allowed him to promote the book largely free from distraction.

Journey to the top

In the book, which is set to hit bookstores Tuesday, the top cop recounts his entire life — from his street-fighting days as a young tough in Paterson, N.J., to his stint as a pony-tailed undercover detective for the NYPD, to a stint as city correction commissioner, to the top of

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the Finest.

That he chose to add a chapter on the World Trade Center disaster has forced him to confront criticism that he was trying to exploit the tragedy.

But the book's November publication date had been determined in July by his editors at the ReganBooks division of HarperCollins, and Kerik has argued that no account of his life would be complete without some mention of the twin towers attack.

In truth, Sept. 11 is more of a footnote in the book, in which Kerik's poor childhood and his decision as an adult to seek out his mother is the central, driving theme.

Kerik begins the 341-page tome — which ends with a remembrance of the 23 NYPD officers lost Sept. 11 — with a description of a recurring dream he has had for more than 40 years about his mother.

The nightmare

It is a dream that begins in darkness, when "the fear comes over me like a fever," Kerik says in the "*60 Minutes*" segment, viewed exclusively by the Daily News.

"Where is Mommy? I cry out," Kerik, red-eyed and often teary, recounts in the interview. "But no one answers. I'm afraid I'll be here forever. My mother will never come for me, and I will never go home.

"I was never really able to tie [the dream] to reality," he says of the nightmare's origins. "I didn't know it was real."

But it was based in reality, as a stunned Kerik discovered last summer, while trying to unravel the mystery of his long-lost mother.

It was only then that Kerik discovered the brutal truth: His mother was a prostitute who may have been bludgeoned to death in a Newark, Ohio, flophouse in 1964 by one of three pimps.

There was never any police investigation, a fact that Kerik now ties to racial undertones.

White slavery ring

"It was a white woman, involved with a black group of pimps, who were involved in a white slavery ring," Kerik said. "And I think at the time the police just felt it wasn't worth investigating."



THOMAS MONASTER DAILY NEWS

BOWING OUT **Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik tells press conference yesterday he will retire effective Jan. 1.**

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The book is dedicated "to my hero, Donald Raymond Kerik Sr.," the commissioner's father, who raised Kerik after his mother disappeared. But the elder Kerik never wanted to dredge up painful memories about his son's mother, whose last known alias was Patricia Bailey.

"My father and I, we never really sat down and talked about that part of my life," Kerik told "60 Minutes."

For years, his only connection to his mother was a tattered baby book, which included a picture of a tiny Kerik sleeping on her lap. The entries stopped when he was 4, and for decades the book was kept in a drawer.

"I guess at the time I thought, if she adored me or loved me as much as she said, why didn't she, why did she leave me?" Kerik said in the interview.

Search for answers

But once the book project got under way last spring, the mystery started to eat away at Kerik, who dispatched NYPD Sgt. Lenny Lemer, an old friend, to pursue the case in his spare time.

"He wanted me to find out about a Patricia Bailey," Lemer says on "60 Minutes." "I said, 'No problem, I'll get right on it.' And as I was about to turn and walk out of his office, he looked up to me and he said, 'That's my mother.' "

What Lemer found was shocking: a woman with a long string of aliases, arrests for prostitution and a coroner's report indicating that she died at age 34 of "cerebral hemorrhage, traumatic."

Lemer later discovered that she likely worked out of a seedy Newark bar called The Lucky Seven, where prostitutes turned tricks for $1 or $2.

Tracing the pimps

Kerik later convinced the Newark, Ohio, Police Department to reopen the case of Patricia Bailey Kerik, and three suspects — all pimps — eventually were identified.

"In all probability, one of those three are responsible for her murder," Kerik tells "60 Minutes." "And all three of them are dead."

The story of his first brush with parenthood is equally tinged with heartache.

It started when he began his law enforcement career as a military police officer in South Korea in the mid-1970s. He met a woman he identifies in the book only as Yi, describing her as "sweet, cute, very shy and not at all interested in the nightlife in the village." It wasn't long before she was pregnant.

"I'm ashamed now to recall how young and stupid and selfish I was then," wrote Kerik. "I didn't want to admit that inside this woman's body was a baby — my baby."

The child was born Oct. 25, 1975, a girl named Lisa. But Kerik was soon transferred back to the States, and he departed alone.

He later learned that Yi married another American serviceman and came to the U.S. to live. Kerik tried to contact her but was angrily rebuffed by Yi's new husband. Later letters to his daughter were returned, and phone numbers never led anywhere.

"I have looked for her ever since," Kerik wrote of his daughter, who would now be 26 years old. "I've never stopped looking."

His only reminder of the baby he once held came in a letter in 1978 with no return address and no readable postmark. Inside was a picture of a dark-eyed little girl smiling at the camera.

"It's the last picture I have of her," he wrote. "And I keep it in my desk drawer."

Three weeks ago, Kerik closed another page on his life when he visited his mother's grave in Plain City, Ohio. Her brothers buried her under the name of Kerik, maybe thinking that her young son might some day come looking.

On the small, plain gravestone, Kerik placed his commissioner's card. On on side was attached an NYPD Medal of Valor he earned in 1993. On the other, "I just scribbled that I forgive her. And I hope she forgives me," Kerik tells "60 Minutes."

"In some sense I feel a sort of feeling of guilt," he says when asked why he felt the need to ask forgiveness. "Maybe if I was around and she had to look after me. Maybe it could have changed her life. Maybe she wouldn't be dead today."

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