

Interview Q&A



author

“A True Love Story” *Life Choices: Navigating Difficult Paths*

Sex and the Zen of Shopping or How to Shop Smart in a Dumb Economy

Sex and Zen comes in color, black & white bargain, and Kindle editions

Could you please tell us a little about “A True Love Story?”

My publisher asked me to contribute to an anthology of stories about pivotal choices that entirely changed the direction of people’s lives. I chose Love from a list of topics ranging from Friendship to Finance. It’s a fairy tale, true life romance that captures people. *“Ask Jesper and Sandra about how they met. It’s the most amazing story.”* The title is a play on words: a love story that’s true and a story about true love.

At first I was unsure that “A True Love Story” belonged in *Life Choices: Navigating Difficult Paths*. The other authors had overcome such adversity. My story seemed frivolous in comparison. But I’m through apologizing for being a romantic. We all need love in our lives and my story affirms that true love and knights in shining armor do exist. You might have to hitch rides on sailboats to pursue them. That’s what you do when you find your heart’s desire; no matter what it is, you go after it.

Who is your biggest supporter?

My husband. He has always encouraged me. *“I believe you can do it, whatever it is. And so far it has been true.”* I think it’s a mix of character and culture. Jesper was raised in Denmark which led the world (along with Sweden) in the emancipation of women. Not only are Scandinavian women allowed to pursue their interests and careers equally with men, they are expected to. At the same time Danish men have been emancipated. They share in childcare and household duties. Fathers take leave from work to care for newborns. Gender roles are much more blurred. I wouldn’t be the person I am today without my husband. He not only encourages and supports, but he pushes when he has to. He pushes me to “finish the book” but he also tells me when it’s time to relax. The last part is his hardest job.

Who is your biggest critic?

I am my biggest critic. I was cursed with a perfectionist streak. If there is a crooked picture frame, it is the first thing I see when I walk in the room. The challenge is not to focus on it and not try to fix everything. I am getting better. In my book *Sex and the Zen of Shopping*, I write about thinking gestalt when you buy used, but the real message is learning to overlook flaws and focus on the big picture.

Judi Moreo, my publisher, is great at reminding me that *“you are more than enough.”* It’s the title of her book and addresses the insecurities many of us have. I am learning that although things are never perfect, never good enough, your only chance at feeling successful is when you can say “It’s good enough.”

What do you feel is your biggest strength?

I’m a multi-faceted person with eclectic interests and talents.

What do you feel is your biggest weakness?

I’m a multi-faceted person with eclectic interests and talents.

The world belongs to specialists and those who can effectively brand themselves and fit into neat categories. That’s not me, but probably needs to be.



What is the most important thing in your life right now?

Hanging on to what I've got. The last couple of years have been devastating to so many people and my family has not been immune. Now that my husband and I are at the stage of our lives when we planned to enjoy the fruits of our labor, we are faced with more work than ever. But we have each other, good, intelligent friends, and children who appear to enjoy our company. Keeping focus on the blessings while working on the practical survival stuff is really important right now.

What cause are you most passionate about?

I can be very passionate about politics, and particularly how it affects the environment, if I let myself. Right now I am using utmost discipline to keep focused on my writing because there is no other way to write and promote a book. You have to have complete tunnel vision. I paid my dues with years of trying to save the world. Now it's time for someone else to play Joan of Arc.

You know the scenario – you're stuck on an island. What book would you bring with you and why?

I've never been stuck on an island, but I've been down to one very small bag of possessions in the middle of the Sahara. In that bag was my copy of the *I Ching*. If you don't want to use it for divination, there is a wealth of philosophy and history and some very beautiful poetry whose meaning you could ponder the rest of your life.

What are you reading right now?

Just about any book written by women for women that is a best seller or close to it. I'm reading all genres, but particularly romance and memoirs, trying to figure out if I can write something that will actually sell.

What do you consider as the most frustrating side of becoming a published author and what has been the most rewarding?

The most frustrating part is getting noticed. The most rewarding part is getting noticed.

What is the most important lesson you have learned from life so far?

You can never know how things will turn out.

If you could go back and change one day, what would it be?

You know I don't even want to go there. You can't change anything you did, so why waste time? I am trying to follow the advice of Shaseki-Shu (13th c Japanese Zen Buddhist) who said "*Do not regret the past. Look to the future.*"

Is there anything you regret doing/not doing?

I would do a lot of things differently. But who knows how *that* would have turned out?



If you could be anywhere in the world for one hour right now, where would that place be and why?

I'd be back in Egypt on the Nile in the Rose Suite at the Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan, sitting on the balcony overlooking Elephantine Island, watching the boat traffic and listening to the sounds of the river. Do I really need to explain why?

What's the first thing you notice when you meet someone?

Their energy field. Sometimes I feel like I see right past the body, although body language tells you almost everything.

Have you ever won anything?

Do elections count? I garnered a big percent of the vote out of a field of candidates for School Board. After that, I lost more votes (on the School Board) than I won. That's what happens when you are on the side of the students.

Do you have any advice for writers or readers?

Advice for writers? Just plunge in and do it. I had to tell myself every day, "I'm not trying to win a Pulitzer Prize here. It's a book on shopping and how to live life with more adventure. It is what it is." "Who will ever read this?" "Who cares?" I had to just push those thoughts aside - often.

What advice could I give a reader? Why, read my books, of course!

Tell us a secret no one else knows.

I don't think so. It wouldn't be a secret any more. If it's worth telling and at all interesting, I want to put it in my next book.

Do you remember writing stories as a child or did the writing bug come later?

I daydreamed constantly as a child, inventing whole new worlds for myself. This lasted well into my teens when my device for falling asleep each night was a cinematic adventure I played out in my mind with myself the beautiful and desirable heroine in some far off place in another time. I used to love creative writing in high school, but never did anything with it. I wrote a lot of poetry during my traveling years, a kind of home version of haiku. I started writing again when I created the blog www.sandraoffthetrip.com. That was more journalism and editorial, but I found out that I will write for hours for free, so that told me something about what I should be doing with my life.

Where's your favorite place to write at home?

At my dining room table with a view out the picture windows onto the Pacific Ocean.



What do you like to do for fun when you're not writing? Where do you like to vacation? Can you tell us briefly about this?

I love to shop, travel, entertain and create. Basically I need to be on the move constantly, whether physically or intellectually. I can be alone and write for days on end; then I explode and have to cook an elaborate meal, set a beautiful table and enjoy the company of good friends.

I'm not sure I know what a vacation is. Traveling is how I live in the now. I used to require traveling to a place where they speak another language or I didn't feel like I had been anywhere. I certainly don't want to see the same restaurants and eat the same kind of food. But of late I enjoy reconnecting with old friends, who may or may not live in exotic places.

Creating - and of the possibilities of photography, writing, cooking, shopping, dressing, and decorating, my joy is what the French call *l'art de la table*. It's astounding how many tablecloths, dishes, glasses and sets of silverware I own (many found in thrift shops and flea markets by the way.) I love doing themed meals with full menus. But I would let anyone do the cooking; just let me set the table.

What are you currently working on?

I call it the Great Triad. First is the promotion of *Life Choices: Navigating Difficult Paths*. Luckily I have a great publisher in Judi Moreo and Turning Point International. She's doing all the hard stuff. I only have to write and show up where and when she tells me.

I am deep into all the technical details of promoting my book, *Sex and the Zen of Shopping*. My author website is up and the blog needs feeding. I'm creating the Press Kit and other like materials for online distribution. Tajine Publishing has released two versions of *Sex and Zen*: a full color and a black and white bargain edition. I'm now working a Kindle version. Writing the book was the easy part.

I've started writing my next book. The inspiration is my 70's scrapbook full of images, quotations and love letters that tell the story of my traveling years. I'm narrowing the focus for this book to North Africa, including my 6 month hitchhiking adventure across the Sahara.

Note: Oh yes, I am slowly compiling a cookbook of full menus from *hors d'oeuvres* to desert. People put together the strangest combinations. I am using my favorite standby recipes, American and international. It's a cookbook for the special occasion. We used to go out to fine restaurants, now we entertain at home.

What's on your to do list today?

Complete this Interview form. Continue working on the Press Kit for my website www.sandragorenielsen.com to promote *Sex and the Zen of Shopping*. Work on my next book which will be a memoir recounting my travels in North Africa, including a 6 month hitchhiking adventure across the Sahara. Post an article on my blog www.sandraoffthetrip.com. Make a lamb and bean tajine for dinner. Take a walk along the raging ocean. Take a long bubble bath.