



KATHARINA CAVANO

Katharina Cavano is a senior nonfiction major and a New Jersey native. She loves to travel and recently brought back a pet elephant from her latest sojourn to Sri Lanka. She hopes that her future will bring traveling, trekking, and, of course, writing all over the world. But at the end of the day, she's happy to curl up in bed with her cat, some tea, and a good book.



Jodi Undressed

I.

She began running away when she was five. She ran from her Levittown, New York, home, from her parents, and the life she had with them. When she was eleven, she had even found a job and a place to live, before her parents foiled her plans, dragging her home once again.

“She began running away when she was five.”

She had planned to return to a dude ranch in Clinton Corners, New York, where she had vacationed with her family and fallen ‘in love’ with the twelve-year-old grandson of the owner. At her full height already, she had called the owner and passed herself off as sixteen and said she would work for room and board at the ranch as a chambermaid. Her father caught her at Grand Central Station just before she was to board her train to Poughkeepsie. The running ended when Jodi Doff was sixteen. By then, her parents were too tired to continue chasing her.

II.

It all began at Robbie’s Mardi Gras on Broadway and Times Square in 1975. After losing her job as a file clerk at the law firm Sennett and Krumholz in New York City, she applied for a job from an ad she saw in the *Village Voice* classifieds. It asked for a barmaid, no experience necessary. It turned out that Jodi was working for one of the largest topless bars in New York City with three stages and about a dozen registers behind the counter. That night, in just a leotard, behind the bar, she made more money than she ever did in a week as a file clerk for Sennett and Krumholz. She made \$85 that shift at the bar, much more than the \$2 an hour she had been making at the firm, before taxes. She lied to her parents, still living at home; Jodi told them that she was working for a restaurant in the city. It wasn’t long before she tried her hand at topless dancing, and for the first time in her life, she felt beautiful.

She became known as JJ, or Double J to friends. Her namesake was a pimp known as JJ Huntzberry. Because most of the bars she worked at and frequented were mob-owned, she chose to keep her real name a secret, in an effort to protect Fred and Elayne Doff back in Levittown.

III.

Times Square was not always the great business district it is famed to be today. Today, about 500,000 people pass through Times Square every day, over thirty million people visit Times Square annually, and the Times Square area makes more than \$1.2 billion each year. Times Square is home to the largest New Year's Eve celebration in the world, and, of course, retail galore, from Disney to Hershey and even MTV and ESPN. This was not the case from the 1950s through close to the 1990s. In 1980, under Mayor Koch, the 42nd Street Development Project began and at the time was one of the largest urban renewal plans in the nation. The Project included thirteen acres, or about two city blocks along 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, and planned to restore seven historic theatres in an attempt to bring life back to the streets of Times Square. But what spurred this movement was the sex industry, which in the 1950s began pushing illustrious old theatres out of business and out of town, and was only aided and abetted by the legalization of sex shops in the 1960s and 1970s.

IV.

Her first dance began in a borrowed blue and dirty g-string and someone else's lucky heels up on center stage, as seemingly endless Jodis smiled back at her in the mirrors that surrounded her. Strengthened by the scent of so many dancers before her, of cheap perfume and a litany of alcohols, she twirled and spun, finally the object of so many men's attention and desire. And in this moment she became

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something beautiful, someone beautiful, someone wanting more than just to impress a father who paid no attention to her, showed her no affection, always compared to her always-pretty mother. Never enough. Before it even began, the moment was shattered, someone was yelling at her to perform ‘floor work,’ or in other words, pretend that she was on top. She had no experience to go off of, she had never seen herself have sex, she had never been on top, she had always on the bottom, staring at the ceiling, hardly moving at all. Jodi was seventeen when she danced that day and was fired from Robbie’s Mardi Gras not long after for talking to ‘niggers.’

V.

After her short stint at Robbie’s Mardi Gras, Jodi returned to school and graduated from community college in 1974 with an associate’s degree in an act to appease her mother. She then transferred to NYU’s film school and studied acting. All she had wanted was to be on Johnny Carson’s *Tonight Show* but she was too busy drinking and getting high to memorize lines, and in 1979, she dropped out of school and returned to the topless bars. While in NYU, she met Red Wolf, named for his bright red hair, in Washington Square Park. They knew each other for two weeks. In that two weeks they drank, and they drugged together: heroin, cocaine, speed, amphetamines. A garbage head, Jodi would take anything she could get. By the end of the two weeks, they exchanged \$5 rings at the Native American Church where they were both members: Jodi because she had been running peyote from New York to Boston, and he because he had some idea that he was Native American. They lived together for two and a half months in Jodi’s East Village one-bedroom apartment, along with Jodi’s roommate, Red Wolf’s brother, Brown Wolf, and about half a dozen runaway kids from Washington Square Park who slept on the floor. In an effort to get the apartment to themselves, Red Wolf convinced Jodi that he had had an affair with her roommate. In the middle of the night, she kicked her roommate, along with everyone else that had been living in the apartment on her dime, out.

Not long afterwards, Jodi came home one night after working at the bar Guys and Dolls to find Red Wolf drunk in bed, in a robe, beret, and eye patch with a Bible. He attempted to beat her to death with the

Bible because she was a ‘whore’ and he was going to beat Satan out of her. He hated her job, hated what she did, hated all the makeup she wore for her job, but never did he hate it enough to get his own. He flushed \$400 in cash down the toilet – ‘Satan’s money’ – and, appealing to the part of him that loved her, she cried and sobbed till the beating stopped. She lay awake all night hoping he would die in his sleep and called her mom from a pay phone the next morning. She returned to him, still sleeping in her apartment, with her parents and the cops to throw him out. They attempted to reconcile a few weeks later, and when Jodi wouldn’t let Red Wolf back into their former apartment, he tried to crack her head on the stoop.

VI.

It all began at Robbie’s Mardi Gras and it all ended at Paul’s Mardi Gras, but in between there was The Butterfly, with the giant, pretty stained glass butterfly and the brass poles, The Lollipop which was opened by the same people as The Butterfly after it closed, and then Guys and Dolls. Jodi was also working as a freelance dancer for a ‘go go agency’ that handled topless dancers. Sent for a gig here, or a gig there, she would make \$75 a shift, no matter what, even without tips or a little extra cash on the side. All the bars were within a couple blocks from each other and they all blended in together, the same people and groups migrating from bar to bar each night till they couldn’t remember where exactly they were. Often, Jodi would get off of a shift at night or in the afternoon and go to another bar to visit other girls to drink and drug while they danced. Some nights it was Billy’s Topless, a little dive in Chelsea, or other nights it would be a bottomless club and while girls walked around and danced without their bottoms, Jodi and her friends would drink and talk. Some nights, Jodi could be found drinking at the gay burlesque and hustler bars.

It was more than a friendship, this bond that Jodi had with the other dancers and players in her circle, but less than a sisterhood. It had a criminal element that tainted the clean idea of a sorority. It was survival. They weren’t a family, they were a subculture, and they were fighting and surviving a war together. It was ‘us against them’ and ‘they’ were the work a days, the suits, all the people who looked down on how Jodi

and the rest of the 'us' made their living. It was survival. And if survival meant getting locked in a bathroom with your best friend at the time, a fellow dancer, holding a gun to your head, Jodi understood.

VII.

Unlike some of the naïve fourteen or fifteen-year-old girls Jodi met while she was working in topless bars and tried to help or give advice to, she herself was far from naïve when it came to sex. She began bar drinking with her guy friends around fourteen years old at The Raven's Nest, a topless bar in Long Island. They would go to shoot pool and drink with truck drivers. By the time she began working at Robbie's Mardi Gras, she was more aware of sex, burlesque, S and M, and porn than the average seventeen-year-old was. Something had happened to her in the summer between fifth and sixth grade. She gained weight, hit puberty, and Jodi, in large, thick rimmed, octagon-shaped glasses, grew uncomfortable with her body and with other people. She chopped most of her dark, kinky curls off with a pair of kitchen shears and felt inadequate and not good enough compared to others around her. By the time she arrived at Robbie's her entire value of herself was as a sexual being. Once she was there, she could drink as much as she wanted, whenever she wanted, and it worked out kind of perfectly. She suddenly had the incredible opportunity to be an object of desire while she was up there dancing. All of a sudden, Jodi was popular. She was popular because she was naked, and she was young but she felt gorgeous and glamorous, and whatever it was that she lost along with the hair she chopped off that summer, she gained it back and she mattered.

VIII.

While Jodi was still living at home, her parents had no idea what she was doing or where she was actually working. It was just another bar in their minds until Jodi moved out of the house and told them where she really was working. In an effort to ease their minds and change their opinions about what a topless bar was really like, Jodi brought her parents to Paul's Mardi Gras to show them that it really wasn't all that bad. They knew only that she had been bartending but had no idea that

she had become a topless dancer at Paul's, which stretched half a city block long, one of the biggest and most glamorous topless bars at the time.

For the first time in her life, Elayne Doff sat on a barstool and came face to face with the reality of her daughter's life. Maybe a part of her guessed at the situation, maybe a part of her didn't want to know, or maybe she really didn't know what Jodi had been doing. What she did know was that she couldn't control her daughter and her daughter's actions, so instead she chose to try and have the best connection possible to Jodi's life. They had an open door policy, and Jodi brought home everyone

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in her life to meet her mother, for dinners, and for overnight stays. From Manhattan to Levittown came Jodi and the prostitutes, Jodi and the hustlers, Jodi and the Hell's Angels, and they would all follow Elayne around the house like puppy dogs looking for love and attention.

One afternoon, Elayne called Jodi up asking what color her eyes were. She kept a rolodex card with Jodi's phone number and address on one side, and on the other side, she had a list of all of Jodi's features, from her hair and eye color down to each and every tattoo and scar on her body. Elayne feared that if the police found Jodi's body dead on the street, she wouldn't be able to identify and retrieve her daughter's body from the morgue.

IX.

I first met Jodi in the summer of 1999; I was eight years old and playing on our small front yard with my younger sister at our home in New Jersey a block from the beach. She sat on the porch at the house next-door to us with several other women, laughing, talking, knitting, and smoking cigarettes. They offered us Oreos out of the open blue package, a treat not normally allowed past the doors of our big red house. It was too tempting to pass up. Jumping over the garden and crossing the short fifteen feet between our houses, I shyly grabbed the

cream-filled cookie. Spending time on their porch during the summers became a tradition. I learned how to knit and crochet, picked up a couple new swear words, and usually just listened to their conversations. They weren't *Sex and The City*; they were real women, real New Yorkers with jobs and PhDs, and I admired them and they encouraged me. I learned about Fran's job at museums in New York City, Debbie's next book tour, and sometimes stories and complaints from Jodi about her latest job at a magazine. She had at least a dozen tattoos, and they fascinated me. I spent many hours asking her what each one was, why she got them and how much they hurt. Each one usually had a story to go along with it and always the moral not to get any. Of course, I thought of Jodi when ten years later I got my first tattoo on my foot, and just as she promised, it hurt like hell.

X.

There's no one cut and dry, clear reason or moment why Jodi left Times Square for good around 1984. But it helped that she fell in love with Bear, a male prostitute who worked at the gay bar O'Neal's in Times Square. Neither of them wanted the other to continue working in the sex industry and it was enough to get her out. She began working as a receptionist at *High Times* magazine, and from there worked in the art department at *National Lampoon* till 1986, and then moved to advertising production at *Playboy* magazine. While working on getting sober, Jodi met Debbie and they became fast friends and in the 90's began vacationing with a few other women in Ocean Grove, New Jersey at the beach during the summers. In 1999, they started renting out the house next door to us. Jodi was the production manager and supervisor for the classified sections of twelve different magazines, including *Motorboating*, *Saltwater Sportsman*, and *Skiing* during the years that she rented the house in Ocean Grove. Four years ago, she moved back to Jackson Heights, returning to where she began.

Jodi stopped coming to Ocean Grove a few years ago when she lost her job and "went broke." She is currently working on her MFA at a school in Massachusetts. She works throughout the semester on her memoir with a mentor, and at the end of the semester, she goes up to the school for about ten days to review her work alongside her peers in the program. She now works at a no-kill veterinarian's office and animal

shelter and adores it. She actually almost didn't get the job because of her past in the sex industry. Jodi doesn't want to hide her past, and when she began *The Dirty Girl Diaries*, a blog, in 2009, her story had already been published in the anthology *Hos, Hookers, Call Girls, and Rent Boys* under a pseudonym. She began using her real name on *The Dirty Girl Diaries* because if she hadn't, it would only be acknowledging that her past should be hidden, "but it's who I was, and it's made me who I am today, and I can now help other people who are in similar situations as I was and do something positive with my past."

