

The Happy Hooker gets the girl.

“Happy Hooker” Xaviera Hollander tells all about her new memoir, her reissued ’70s sex tome, and “turning gay” in midlife

By Cathay Che

August 20, 2002



A generic hotel lobby, filled with dowdy couples in matching golf attire, is the last place one would expect to find the infamous Xaviera Hollander, author of the newly reissued 1972 cult classic *The Happy Hooker*. But there she is, sitting quietly on a beige sofa, almost blending in except for her dramatic eye makeup, diaphanous gypsy-style floral-print blouse, and butch companion, whom she introduces as “my slave girl of 28 years.”

“Say hello and then say goodbye and go,” she says mock-sternly. Hollander, who was born Xaviera de Vries, fondly watches the woman go.

“She’s a great help to me, but sometimes she teases me and provokes me to the point of anger, and I have to punish her,” says Hollander. “So it’s an S/M relationship, but it’s a lasting, loving, lifelong bond, and no one can come between us.” She pauses to flash a naughty smile, then adds, “Of course, she’s not my girlfriend, just my slave girl.”

Oh, yes, there’s a girlfriend too. “I turned gay about five years ago,” Hollander begins. “I always had women as a second dish, for when I was a bit fed up with men. But now I have a relationship with a woman, Dia, that I write quite a bit about in [my memoir], and we’ve been together five years.”

Now men are the occasional side dish for Hollander, 59, whose sexual adventures continue. For instance, tonight this icon of carnal fulfillment has a poetic escapade planned that makes those *Sex and the City* girls look like downright prudes—a date with a man who lost his virginity to Hollander 25 years ago, when she was working as a prostitute in New York and he was just 18. “We’ve been E-mailing for two years now,” she says excitedly, “so tonight we’re going to consummate the act again after a quarter of a century.”

Amusing, instantly likable, and whip-smart, Hollander is in possession of a life so unconventional and fantastical, it’s more twisted than fiction. No wonder people seek her advice on sexual protocols each month in her *Call Me Madam* column, which has run in [Penthouse](#) for the past 30 years. To boot, she has published more than a dozen books of

erotica in Europe, has just recorded a reflective spoken-word CD, and is a fringe theater enthusiast who regularly travels to the Edinburgh Festival and stages performances in her Amsterdam home, also a [bed-and-breakfast](#), “or really a bed-and-brothel,” she jokes. She keeps a second residence in Marbella, Spain. And in the works are a perfume and a documentary about her life.

But perhaps the most surprising act yet from the sexpert and wayward feminist icon is her latest book, *Child No More*, a tender memoir in which she writes about the tumultuous relationship between her Jewish intellectual father, whom she adored, and her German model mother, with whom she was often at odds—against the backdrop of World War II.

Born in Indonesia, Hollander was confined, along with her parents, for her first two years inside Japanese prison camps. The family found safety in Holland after the war (thus the professional moniker, Hollander). Not surprisingly, as Xaviera grew up, her mother was severely overprotective. “That’s why the book is called *Child No More*, because I was a child to my mother until I was 55. Sometimes it was a stifling feeling, like, Don’t strangle me with your love.”

But when Hollander’s mother died three years ago, she was moved by the desire, after years of craving the spotlight herself, to celebrate her mother’s life and her sacrifices. “But for a bag of sugar, I wouldn’t be alive,” she remarks. “The war had already started, and against the wishes of my father, I was born. Mother loved me almost to death, literally. She actually risked her own life by smuggling a bag of sugar inside her vagina into the camp. She was caught and almost killed. All that for me—I had dysentery—to keep me alive.”

Hollander’s mother went on to stand by her daughter through years of controversy around her well-documented sexcapades. “I did everything I could to hurt my mother, which, of course, I regretted,” she says. But Hollander says she came to understand and accept how alike they were. One example: A few years after Hollander’s father died, her mother also “turned gay.” True to form, Hollander’s response to her mother’s big revelation was somewhat unusual: “I set her up with the woman who became her lover.”