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Sexual Health

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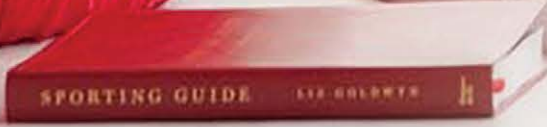
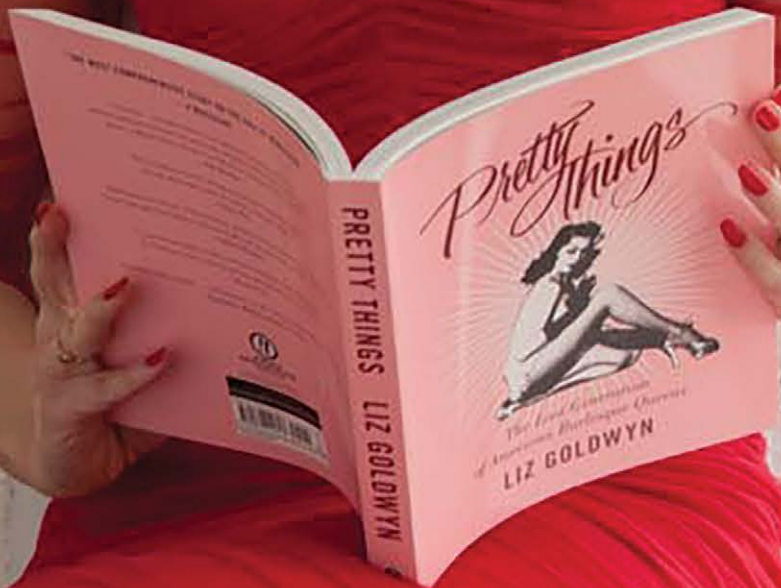
THE DAY MY
**GIRL BONER
DIED**



Liz Goldwyn

FROM HOLLYWOOD ROYALTY
TO SEX-ED TRAILBLAZER

Liz



Goldwyn

From Hollywood Royalty to Sex-Ed Trailblazer

BY ARIANA RODRIGUEZ

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rom iconic vixens of the golden age to steamy sex scenes on the big screen, and today's obsession with celebrity scandals, sex and Hollywood have always gone together.

Serving up unrealistic expectations for sexual experiences, romantic relationships and body image, it's easy to get lost in the magic of movies. Sparking fantasies in all of us, Hollywood (and even porn) movies have also contributed to our never-ending need for proper sex education. Nobody knows this better than Liz Goldwyn.

Any fan of Hollywood history will immediately recognize her famous last name — she's the granddaughter of movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn, and growing up with a film producer father (Samuel Goldwyn, Jr.), Liz has had a front seat to the glitz and glamour all of her life. At the same time, as the daughter of the feminist screenwriter and novelist Peggy Elliott, Goldwyn also got a real-life education on sexual health when her mom introduced her to Planned Parenthood at 13 years old. At that formidable age, Goldwyn started working as a paid intern at Planned Parenthood, and thus began her career in sex education.

Goldwyn is a writer, filmmaker and artist living and working in Los Angeles. She directed the HBO documentary "Pretty Things" based on her non-fiction book "Pretty Things: the Last Generation of the American Burlesque." Her other book, "Sporting Guide: Los Angeles," is a collection of short stories based on Goldwyn's original research on prostitution in

Los Angeles in the 1890s — before the glitz and glamour of Hollywood.

Goldwyn's creative genius doesn't stop there — she's served as the New York Editor of French Vogue, contributed to The New York Times Magazine, The Financial Times, British Vogue and Vanity Fair, and has been commissioned as an artist and designer for brands such as M.A.C Cosmetics and Van Cleef & Arpels.

With piercing blue eyes, enviable cheekbones and her signature ruby-red lips, Goldwyn exudes Hollywood opulence. Listening to her speak reveals the honesty and true passion behind her work — in this case, it's TheSexEd.com, her educational digital platform that's dedicated to sex, health and consciousness in the digital age.

The Sex Ed features a robust selection of content in a variety of formats, including informative articles, a podcast, videos and book recommendations on a variety of topics related to sex. Each of the sexperts that have contributed to TheSexEd.com has more than 10,000 hours of experience in their respective fields. From clinical sexology and kink, to mindful meditation and sexual medicine — The Sex Ed was created to help cultivate a deeper understanding, openness and acceptance of sex, health and consciousness.

With the second season of The Sex Ed coming up, Sexual Health magazine had a chance to sit down with Goldwyn to discuss her highly engaging approach to sex education.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *What inspired you to launch *The Sex Ed*?*

LIZ GOLDWYN: My first job was at Planned Parenthood in Los Angeles in the Santa Monica clinic when I was 13. I was a paid intern. First, I answered phones. I helped organize their media library, where a lot of parents — especially single dads, surprisingly — would come in, check out materials and figure out how to talk to their teenage kids, especially their daughters around my age, about sex.

I was put in the position of being asked all these questions that were way above what I actually had personal experience in. But at the same time, even earlier than that, I was naturally curious about sex and wanted to know things and wanted to read books — and wanted more than the books my parents were giving me, like “Where Do I Come From?” and “What’s Happening to Me?” — [a book] about puberty.

I was stealing my dad’s Playboy, and I would ask questions — and as liberal as my parents were, I also found that they weren’t entirely comfortable speaking to me about the intimate side of sexuality. Most parents aren’t. Most kids or most people in general, I think, are afraid to ask questions about sex because they think everyone has it more figured out than they do. So I think that pretty early on, I had this dream of building a comprehensive sex-ed database.

And then, later on in life — in 2008, I bought the domain name. I had already written one book about the history of burlesque and was writing another book about prostitution. Throughout my career speaking about sexuality, I still got asked those same questions I got asked when I was 13. So all of that was behind launching *The Sex Ed*.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *Tell me more about *The Sex Ed*’s different content formats. Why was it important to offer podcasts and articles, as well as cover different topics?*

GOLDWYN: We have a lot of different tools for comprehension. I think that people learn in different ways, and they like to engage in different ways. We have podcasts — we just wrapped our first season, and our second season starts coming out in May. We have live talks and events. Some are public, and some are private — all around the world. And usually, we try to include videos of those talks on the site after they come out.

We have original essays and artwork, and I would say this is the beta mode of the site; there is much more to come. But it’s interesting because some people engage more through our social media; some people engage more with the articles. Some people engage more with the podcast. It just sort of depends.

Meeting people where they’re at is why we have different formats — and also, in the way we edit pieces, we always try to spell things

“More people around the world, especially more women, have tapped into the force of their sexual energy more.”

out. We never assume that anyone knows the littlest thing about whatever the subject is. For example, *Anal Sex 101* — we make sure to present it as though you’re just explaining to a layman, what is anal sex, and how does it work? And does it hurt? How can they try it?

My goal is to normalize these subject matters outside of communities that either aren’t sex-positive or aren’t comfortable with their bodies. There are billions of people around the world that don’t have access to this information. Also, we want to go after people who, because of their cultural or religious background, haven’t had access to sex education. That doesn’t mean they should be denied the right to pleasure.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *What are your favorite sex topics to discuss?*

GOLDWYN: The interesting thing is that because we’re a startup company and we’re developing feedback, we get tons of interaction from the people who use the site. Sometimes, there are topics that I really want to talk about, but they don’t perform as well. And other times, people really want to know something. But interestingly enough, the stuff that’s doing the best are either things like strap-on sex — or all the stuff we do around orgasmic meditation and mindfulness, which is a big area of interest for me personally. Those do very well. And then, on the other end, are things like anal sex and BDSM. We see interest in both. It’s a combination of things that people request. And in terms of experts, a lot of them are people in my network through years of being in the field of sexuality and studying it. Then, when people are asking for specific information, I try to find people who have the best answers for that.

I try to make sure I have a balance of people who are accredited medical experts and people from within the adult industry, people from within the fetish industry. I think that you can’t have a full discussion around sex education unless you take into account people who have been doing real field work. There are a lot of voices within the adult industry that are great sex educators that may not get the chance to speak openly in a traditional educational format because of their profession. Someone like Nina Hartley, who is so well-spoken, is so valuable. We need to be teaching porn literacy, and who better to teach it?

SEXUAL HEALTH: *What do you hope readers and listeners gain from *The Sex Ed*?*

GOLDWYN: I want people to feel more comfortable about themselves. We get messages from people saying things like, “I’m worried my vulva is too small, and that’s why I’m still a virgin.” Or, “I think I’m an aberration because everywhere I look online, it says I’m supposed to feel things from my prostate, but I don’t.” And so, the idea that



there are people walking around on the planet that feel shame or fear or trauma around their bodies — or around their sexuality — it just really pains me. Any small way that I can put information out there that is easily accessible — that’s what I love about the internet: that it’s democratized information.

You can be anonymous and be anywhere in the world and type in “period sex,” and our site can come up — and you can read something about that. Any small way that I can make someone feel more comfortable with themselves, or that they’re not alone. Or that there are other people that are asking the same questions — then I’m doing my job.

I’m lucky that I have a network of people I can ask questions to. As human beings, we’re all constantly evolving sexually. Another area I want to get into is sex and aging. I feel like that is a whole audience that has been left out of the discussion about sex.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *When did you first become interested in sex education?*

GOLDWYN: My father was a charming playboy. I also have four brothers. So I grew up around a lot of male energy. As I mentioned, I used to steal my father’s Playboy magazines. On the flip side, my

mom was super feminist and had strong, negative opinions around porn. I had both extremes in my parents. I had a father who loved women; he was in the movie business. The entertainment business has traditionally been built on creating a fantasy and selling idealized versions of “sexuality” and “femininity.” There are differences between Hollywood and porn, of course.

My mother, on the other hand, was like, “Don’t get married until you’re 40. Never be economically dependent on a man.” She worked with Planned Parenthood when I was growing up. It was my mother that first brought me there (Planned Parenthood.) I, separately, was obsessed with pink and corsets. I got into pinups and burlesque when I was a teenager and wrote my first book about that. I think that was a little hard for her to understand at first — that I could be feminine, but then, was extremely interested in being empowered by sexuality.

I took a little bit from both my parents, but it was my own interest in it. I had jobs in the corporate world from the time I was 17 and was often working with men who were 20 years older than me. Outside of my day job, I was researching sexuality. But in my day job, I felt I had to very much downplay my own sexuality to be taken seriously in the business world. Of course I still had breasts and wore red lipstick! It was a little bit of a struggle. But culturally, all of these things are starting to be talked about more in the open.

I was really curious about human sexuality. And just on that note, the two books that I wrote — one was about burlesque and the advent of striptease. The other was about prostitution in L.A. in the 1890s. Both were essentially books about groups of women and what they did for a living. And let's remember that up until about 100 years ago, women didn't have as many choices for economic employment as they do now. Sex work was a real and valid option. But because of what they did for a living, they were looked down upon by society. So again, that's something that's very interesting to me too: if you choose to work in sex, there's a stigma that's attached to it.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *Coming from a family that's so embedded in Hollywood/film-making — what is your opinion of the way the entertainment industry portrays sex?*

GOLDWYN: I think there's a lot of double standards, clearly, in terms of the way in which Hollywood has traditionally portrayed sex. In one of our podcasts, in the first season, we had a woman named Karina Longworth, who has a really great show called "You Must Remember This." It's all about Old Hollywood. She wrote a book about Howard Hughes, and the whole episode of the podcast I did with her was all about sex and Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s and the studio system during the Hayes Code, which was a censorship code in Hollywood.

At a certain time in Hollywood, you could not have a leading man being gay, for example. You could not have a woman who was sexually liberated on-screen be a heroine. If a woman was divorced or if she'd had an affair or had a child out of wedlock or was an adulteress, she had to die in the movie. We've come, obviously, a long way since then, but in terms of the way in which sex is portrayed on screen, there are some movies that I can point to.

In the podcast, I talk about that movie "Short Cuts" by Robert Altman. The scene in "Short Cuts" where Julianne Moore is arguing with her boyfriend, and she's just wearing a shirt and has a full red bush below — and it feels like so natural. It felt so real. There was no sex happening, but you never saw a woman with a full-frontal bush standing there arguing with her boyfriend — as opposed to every time you saw a woman naked, and it felt very much like male gaze. There have been some movies that came out that have had a more naturalistic portrayal of sexuality. I like the movie called "Duck Butter" that came out, I believe, last year. It was a queer love story.

When I look at the system of Hollywood — and even though I'm not in the porn industry, there used to be a system of porn too. Both of the studio systems, Hollywood and porn, were largely controlled by men. And it wasn't until you got into the internet and cam girls that you started to see, in pornography, a lot more women

gaining economic control and existing outside of those studio systems. I think you probably saw it earlier in porn than you did in Hollywood, where you had more women deciding to direct their own films and do their own production.

I remember that Jenna Jameson had a book come out with my same publisher, and I saw what she was doing with her business and found that interesting — also, someone like Belladonna, who was making gonzo films. Again, I don't know enough about the industry to be able to speak about it, but I would say there are probably a lot of parallels — and probably a lot of things that need to change in both industries.

In Hollywood, there's supposed to be a whole thing — Time's Up — where it's supposed to change by 2050 with women and people of color in positions of power. I'm not sure whether the adult industry will go through that as well, but what's great about the internet and great about the democratization of pornography and entertainment in general is that now, you can have filmmakers like Erika Lust. You can have independent filmmakers deciding, "Well, wait, I want to make my own erotica. I want to make the kind of porn that I want to see" — and taking matters into their own hands.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *What are your favorite sex topics to discuss?*

GOLDWYN: For me, personally, I'm really interested in the intersection of sexuality and consciousness — and sexuality and spirituality. Those have been very far apart for too long.

Sexuality, for me, is life force energy — it's creative energy. So the idea of becoming sexually empowered doesn't even mean that you have to be having sex with another person. But it means becoming more aware of that power within you and that sexual force within you. It could be as simple as body awareness — awareness of your breasts, orgasm breathing — the technique where you can breathe yourself to orgasm.

More people around the world, especially more women around the world, have tapped into the force of their sexual energy more. You can use this energy in your creative life and your professional life. I think that's really fascinating.

I also think it's really interesting also when I talk to people who are Muslim or Hindu or Christian or have been raised in a strict religious doctrine and I've talked to them about how they feel kind of left out of the expression of sexuality. If you go into a bookstore and look for books on self-help or spirituality, they're all in separate sections. But I feel really good talking about wellness in a holistic sense. To me, that includes sexuality. That includes an awareness of you as a sexual being. And that also includes an awareness of self-love and the way in which we teach very young kids about their bodies and about themselves.

"I'm doing The Sex Ed now because from the time I was a kid, I could never foresee a point in life where the government would allow information to be disseminated."





■ Erika Lust, erotic filmmaker, discusses “Pleasure, Power & Porn” with Goldwyn in New York, Nov. 2018.

Instead of talking about what genitals are, we give them nicknames and say to kids, “Don’t touch yourself,” when we should be teaching people self-love. What about rediscovering sex as something really sacred and beautiful and even transcended?

SEXUAL HEALTH: *Who are some of the sexual wellness leaders that you look up to?*

GOLDWYN: Dr. Ruth. I love Dr. Ruth. I think she’s amazing. I mean, there are so many people. I really like this woman, Erica Chidi Cohen, who has a center in Los Angeles called Loom (ThisIsLoom.com). She’s a doula and works with people going through birth and also through abortion or miscarriage. I think she’s doing really good work out there. There are organizations like the LGBTQ Center (LALGBTCenter.org) that are doing incredible work, and Fenway Health in Boston — they have an entire specialty on transgender medicine.

There are a lot of people on the consciousness side of things that are doing great work. There are people like Betony Vernon

(BetonyVernon.com), who we cover on our site — she’s a mistress of the ropes and works a lot on healing trauma through rope play. Betony’s doing great work. I try to feature people on the podcast who I think are leaders in the field.

I’d love to add UCLA as well — especially their Couples Sex and Therapy Training Program at The Semel Institute, and my late mentor Dr. Walter Brackelmanns (and Dr. Wendy Cherry who is carrying on his work.)

SEXUAL HEALTH: *How would you describe the current state of sex-ed in the U.S.? Where do people get their sex education these days?*

GOLDWYN: I think people are getting it through porn, and they’re getting it early through porn. They’re not receiving the right kind of tools through which to process that information. They’re not receiving psychological support. They’re not receiving intimacy training. I think we’ve also entered a period where sex has become so transactional due to the nature of digital dating apps.

When I do talks, a lot of people ask questions in public in front of other people. But the people who approach me privately are the virgins. There are lots of virgins in their late 20s who feel too shamed to raise their hands and admit that because they feel like everyone else is living these really wild and free lifestyles and they’re not. I think we’ve reached a really dangerous place where there’s no information that comes along with porn.

Porn is not going to go away. Prostitution is not going to go away. These are here to stay. So I do feel like we need to build really comprehensive training for parents to be able to talk to their kids about sex in light of the fact that their kids are going to go online and look up sex. And it’s not going to happen under this administration, but ideally, we would have comprehensive sex education in school.

I’m doing The Sex Ed now because from the time I was a kid, I could never foresee a point in life where the government would allow information to be disseminated. There’s so much stuff going on right now.

SEXUAL HEALTH: *What can we expect in the future from you and The Sex Ed?*

GOLDWYN: Our new season of the podcast comes out in May, which I’m really excited about. It’s going to go from May through mid-to-late October. We have 22 episodes and some really good guests on this season that cross over between pop culture, Hollywood, drag, medicine, religion, politics and law. They’re all over the map. I’m really excited that our future plans for The Sex Ed include a lot more mainstream partners. Mainstream people keep joining the conversation. Again, I feel like the more we normalize the conversation, the more inroads we make in terms of having a healthier culture.

We’re building more aspects of the business and will be able to offer more multimedia tools than we have now. And we have a lot more public talks coming up this year. I just did one in L.A. for Frieze L.A., which is a big art fair. We’re also making inroads with reaching out to foreign audiences with the content that we have on the site, and working on making our site more of a global site. ■



■ Goldwyn with adult actress, author and sex-positive advocate Nina Hartley and burlesque queen Dita Von Teese at The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; May 2018.



■ Dr. Kate Lister, owner of "Whores of Yore," a living archive of sexual history, and author and sexual anthropologist Betony Vernon join Goldwyn in London, Oct. 2018.