

The 'Happy Hooker' uncovered

Almost forty years later, women's sexual freedom still owes a debt to
Xaviera Hollander By **TANYA ENBERG**, QMI AGENCY

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I've gotta say, Xaviera Hollander did seem like a pretty happy hooker. Even now, 39 years after her titillating bestselling memoir put her name on the



Xaviera Hollander, a.k.a. The Happy Hooker.
(Courtesy of RED Productions, Inc.)

tongues of the masses, the one-time madame still radiates.

Perhaps that's the result of doing work you love and, truly,

Hollander - who was a secretary before her entry into the \$1,000 a night prostitution biz in New York City - enjoyed her work.

Now Hollander's glamorous and extraordinary life, one that helped bring women's pleasure out from underneath the covers, is being revisited in the award-winning documentary, Xaviera Hollander, The Happy Hooker: Portrait of a Sexual

Revolutionary, by director and clinical sexologist Robert

Dunlap. It premieres on ichannel on Dec. 13.

A far cry from her early beginnings, born in the Dutch East Indies in 1943 as Xaviera de Vries and spending the first two years of her life in a Japanese internment camp, Hollander eventually took to entertaining male clients. Her adventures led to the writing of a memoir that offered women a rather fun alternative to bedroom romps that had once been entirely centered around the pleasure of men.

Yes, even if gals hid their copies of the tell-all - filled with stories of lesbian encounters, bondage, the New York swingers' scene and fetishism - it was being eagerly lapped up. To date, the explicit account of Hollander's life as a working gal and madame has sold more than 15 million copies.

While Hollander currently keeps busy producing theatre and running a bed and breakfast in Amsterdam, and regardless of the fact she had penned a

column for Penthouse magazine for more than 30 years and has written almost 20 books, it's *The Happy Hooker* for which she remains best known. "Her pioneering looks behind the brothel doors opened up sexuality for women around the world longing to know not just how to please their man but the mysteries of the hidden world of prostitution," explains Dunlap.

"Oddly enough, it is common to hear from women of all ages how the words of Xaviera Hollander gave them their first insights into authentic sexual expression and feminism. Xaviera has never been ashamed of her sexuality. It is and has been very normal, for her, to express her sexuality."

To leave such a lasting imprint is fascinating, because in reality, Hollander only worked in the sex trade for five years.

"All of her fame was after she left sex work," says Dunlap. "The book *The Happy Hooker*, followed by movies and Penthouse, all came after she quit being a madam and hooker."

For *Sex and the City* fans, Hollander makes Samantha Jones look like an innocent. In fact, it's unlikely the famously libido-driven character and others like her could have been created if it weren't for women like Hollander. The 90-minute doc offers a fascinating glimpse into the past of a brazen sexual pioneer and arrives at a rather interesting time in sexuality, particularly in the U.S., observes Dunlap.

"We are possibly coming out of another very sexually repressed cycle in our modern history," says the filmmaker.

"The fact that we are still debating gay marriage, 'Don't ask, Don't tell' and abstinence-only sex ed says a lot about our society. On the other side, we have people who have been starved for sexual freedom of expression and choice. They will appreciate this film and the Sexual Revolution depicted as the backdrop to her life story. Hopefully they will understand the challenges that Xaviera met in the past, and that, shamefully, we are now still fighting for."

A '70s sexual timeline:

- Before he was Rocky, Sylvester Stallone starred in the softcore film, *The Party and Kitty and Stud's* (1970)
- In 1971, Jane Fonda won her first Academy Award for Best Actress in her portrayal of a prostitute in the murder mystery *Klute*.
- Shock waves and intrigue hit the movie theatre in 1972 with the release of *Deep Throat*
- Physician Alex Comfort publishes bestselling sex manual, *The Joy of Sex* in 1972
- Adult film star Marilyn Chambers stars as Gloria in the 1972 adult orgy film, *Behind the Green Door*
- Burt Reynolds poses nude for the April 1972 issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine
- In 1974, the sexual comedy, *My Pleasure is My Business* starring Xaviera Hollander is released
- The film adaptation of the *Happy Hooker* arrives in 1975, starring Lynn Redgrave