

'Child No More: A Memoir' by Xaviera Hollander

Reviewed by Lily Burana Sunday, July 14, 2002;

CHILD NO MORE

A Memoir

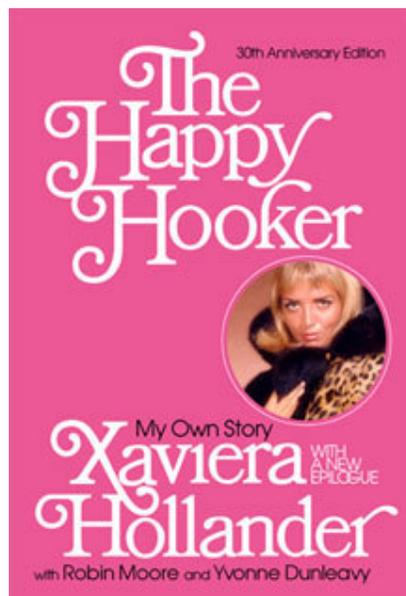
By Xaviera Hollander

Regan. 305 pp.



What becomes an erotic legend most? Longevity. Sex symbols have notoriously short shelf-lives, and the few that endure loom large in our pop-culture consciousness: Liz, Marilyn, Madonna. In an age of fleeting sexperts and flavor-of-the-month porno queens, it's nothing short of remarkable that after 30 years [The Happy Hooker](#) is still a household name. Any major corporation, let alone pin-up, would kill for such brand recognition.

In 1972, Dutch immigrant Xaviera Hollander (née Vera de Vries) rocketed to fame with the publication of [The Happy Hooker](#), her chronicle of her adventures as an upscale Manhattan madam and call girl. Translated into 15 languages, the book sold millions, as people boosted their hipness quotient by snapping it up -- and many young baby boomers gleaned cheap thrills and some singular sex education from purloined copies.



The poised and unrepentant Hollander became an emblem of post-Woodstock sexual libertinism and remains a much-beloved iconoclast in gay, porn and alt.sex circles. While high-falutin hookers have long been a staple of literature and film, from Fanny Hill to Butterfield Eight to "Pretty Woman," Hollander stands apart because [The Happy Hooker](#), is not a product of male imagination or a life story told behind the safe scrim of "fiction."

It was presented as 100 percent autobiography. With this bold tack, Hollander attained mythic stature. In a sexually confused society, whores are simultaneously prized and reviled -- regarded as avatars of both sensual emancipation and cold opportunism -- and it takes steely nerve to endure projections of such intensity. Whether or not you approved of her, Hollander showed that she had chutzpah in spades.

She has now written [Child No More](#), another autobiographical effort, published concurrently with a 30th-anniversary edition of [The Happy Hooker](#),. Though racy moments abound, [Child No More](#) is less about sex than family -- biological and self-selected. The

book begins and ends with Hollander caring for her elderly mother as she succumbs to cancer. In between, Hollander sketches the course of her life and that of her vivacious, enigmatic parents.

Born in Indonesia, in 1943, to Germaine, a German model, and Mick, a dapper Jewish doctor with literary aspirations, little Vera was welcomed into a stable if unconventional home. Her tipping mother lived in fear that her jealous female rivals would practice *guna guna* (Indonesian black magic) on her; her father kept a black bear and an ape as pets.

The family was torn apart during the Japanese invasion, when Vera and Germaine were sent to one prison camp, Mick to another. The details are truly horrifying. Hollander writes of the sadistic soldiers in the women-and-children's camp: "A favorite practice was for [a soldier] to thrust his fingers into the sides of a woman's mouth and then tear it open from cheek to cheek, leaving a bleeding gash where there had been a mouth."

The family reunited, and Vera's development thenceforth was uneventful. She was an average girl, by turns mindful and disdainful of parental influence, petulant, curious, and full of longing for the outside world. Her adulthood was more *outré*, as she pinged about the globe -- South Africa, New York, Amsterdam, Marbella, Spain -- surrounding herself with colorful, adoring lovers of both sexes. "I equated monogamy with monotony," she writes. Her hooker days are glossed over as recollections of lovers, her father's death from a stroke, and her mother's devoted presence and ultimate decline weave in and out of the narrative. Armchair analysts will find a veritable Freudian bonanza here; Hollander repeatedly mentions her lifelong crush on her father, her resentment of her parents' sexual bond, and the resemblance of one of her female lovers to her mother.



[The Happy Hooker](#), enthusiasts will welcome this to their collection of Hollander lore, but [Child No More](#) lacks the craft and level of introspection necessary to capture a large share of new readers. Hollander made a career of breaking the shackles of shame, assuming sexual entitlement in a way that still seems liberating to some while quaintly retro to others. [Child No More](#) does nothing to tarnish her saucy iconic status, yet it doesn't do much to expand it, either -- which is the only shame in all this. •

Lily Burana is the author of "Strip City: A Stripper's Farewell Journey Across America."