



**BURLESQUE
YOGA
SEX
AND
LOVE**



A Memoir of Life Under the
Albuquerque Sun

ANNE KEY

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*To all of those who have sought the deepest
mysteries of life, love, sex and art,
and to their brave partners who join the quest.*





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PART I:

2011



July 2011

Sticky Nipples



I've managed to stick the tape to itself, my fingers, and the floor: everywhere but to the backs of the pasties. It's a mess. Strands of one of the tassels are now stuck to the tape and I'm struggling to free them. I feel like I'm back in my Bluebird Campfire Girls, trying to glue a little, pink felt skirt to a wooden clothespin to make a doll. Then and now, my adhesive is adhering in all the wrong places, and everyone else has finished. The difference is that this evening, instead of being with a group of middle school girls in blue vests, I'm with a group of half-naked women. They have all successfully applied their pasties over their nipples and are busy twirling, while the instructor, Miss Indigo Blue, makes her way over to give me a hand. I'm hoping that my upturned, smiling face masks my deep internal sigh of frustration.

Her expert hands take the tiny pasties from my sticky paws. She looks at me, and I say "I'm new," hoping this explains everything. She smiles quite sweetly and then recuts and expertly affixes the tape, showing me best practices for application. Holly Rebelle, the leader of Burlesque Noir—the troupe that sponsored this class in tassel twirling, and the troupe I would like to join—gives me some tips on the next step: applying the pasties to my nipples. I hold the bottom edge of the pastie right below the areola, then scoop up my breast and press the top of the pastie farther up, giving a little lift. I hold the pastie tight to my squishy breast, then let go. It stays, and I let out the breath I hadn't realized I was holding. Left pastie applied. Now on to the task of adhering the right one so it is even with the left.

Pasties are a burlesque staple and have been used since the 1920s to remain in compliance with the law, so that a performer could strip without being “topless.” Carrie Finnell, who began her career with the Zigfield Follies in 1916, is credited with adding tassels to pasties, creating tassel twirling. Carrie was described as “this nice lady who looked every bit like your mom” but who would then break out into a striptease. She began her life as a gym teacher in Kentucky, developing her pectoral muscles to the point that she could move her breasts individually in any direction. In 1957 Cabaret Magazine reported her saying “We’ve all got ‘em, but I make mine work for me. What do you do with yours?” In one of her pastie-twirling performances, she mimicked a twin engine propeller plane. An observer described her performance:

... faster and faster the (first tassel) would spin while its fellow tassel lay limp and neglected on the other bosom. Then the other tassel would come to life. It would start spinning slowly, while the first tassel was at full speed. Carrie looked like a twin engine bomber.¹

I don’t think I will ever be able to move my breasts independently of each other, even with my belly dance-trained pectoral muscles. But at least I can get the tassels to twirl.

Miss Indigo Blue has a natural honesty and groundedness I did not expect in a woman who carries the title of the 2011 Reigning Queen of Burlesque and is headmistress of her Seattle-based burlesque academy.² Her dark hair frames creamy skin, and slender limbs speak to her years as a dancer. But her most beguiling quality is her smile and disarmingly earthy humor.

Along with Holly, the other ladies from Burlesque Noir in attendance are Mary Jane Monroe, General Blackery and Delicia Dollcurls. I find myself joining them in their complete unselfconsciousness about being topless, and I am surprised at how easy that is. However, my self-consciousness about being unable to apply the pastie by myself sits over me like a cloak.

We learn twirling techniques and, thanks to my background in belly dance, I'm able to isolate my shoulder and chest muscles and can actually twirl pretty well. The cloak of self-consciousness begins to lift a bit and I laugh. This is fun. I look around and the other women are laughing too; we are having a great time together. Someone, I think Mary Jane Monroe, tries lying on her back to twirl and it works. I try it too and, surprisingly, the tassels twirl heartily in no time. A warm feeling of pride burbles up: I have a move.

It is one thing to sit with a group of women and be half or even fully naked. This happens all the time in a spa, at a BNL (a clothing swap, aptly named a "bare naked ladies party") or the locker room at yoga. I have a niggling feeling deep in my gut that this will be more challenging than changing clothes in the locker room.



The global recession that began in 2007 radically changed my life. As an online adjunct faculty member at a college, my per-class student limit rose (first from 25 to 30, then to 35), full-time faculty position openings were frozen, and classes were cut. My chances of finding full-time employment fizzled. The company that my husband, Ben, worked for struggled. Finally, in January of 2011, he was furloughed indefinitely, and we both found ourselves looking for new employment. Hood River, the small Oregon town that we called home on the banks of the Columbia River, was picturesque beyond belief but offered few job openings, so we both began looking at opportunities anywhere. By mid-spring, Ben was offered an interview by a company in Albuquerque.

Spring in Oregon is a wet, dreary affair. In the Columbia River Gorge, the early months of the year are often completely socked in, with a low ceiling of white clouds lying heavily in the sky, reducing the sun to a dim glow. But on the first day of March 2011, as we stepped outside the doors of the Albuquerque airport (aptly named Sunport), the sun was dazzling. I tried to remember if I even owned a pair of sunglasses. I would certainly need them in Albuquerque.

After his interview, Ben picked me up at the hotel, and we decided to see the city and find some lunch. We cruised down Central Avenue, aka historic Route 66. Route 66 is part of the history and culture of Albuquerque. One of the first highways of the US highway system, it originally ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, through Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. It was established in the late 1920s and, for the next few decades, motels, restaurants, shops and service stations bloomed like wildflowers on either side. The mom-and-pop ventures used catchy names or architecture to attract roadsters to their places of business, the most unforgettable being the Wigwam Hotel near Flagstaff, Arizona, which featured rooms built in the shape of a tipi.

We stopped for lunch at Kelly's, a brewpub housed in a repurposed historic building originally built in 1939 as a Ford dealership and service station serving the Route 66 motor craze. When it was built, it was considered one of the most modern structures in the West. Sitting outside on the spacious patio next to an antique Texaco gas pump, munching on a buffalo burger and sweet potato fries, quaffing a beer, soaking in bright sun, Ben and I fell under the spell of the Land of Enchantment.

Fortunately, Ben was offered the job, and we found the perfect adobe-style house within walking distance of Kelly's. After a couple of weeks, we were in a truck moving our essentials, including our menagerie of five cats (Chloe, Rachel, Castor, Pollux and Romeo) and one red-tailed boa constrictor (Asherah), to our new home.



The month before moving to Albuquerque, I took my first burlesque class. After years of belly dance, I wanted to branch out and try a new art form. I had seen the movie *Burlesque* with Cher and Christina Aguilera, and I thought that point of burlesque was basically to add a little “heat,” a dash of seduction and a few suggestive moves to a dance. After a few classes we learned a complete chair routine, chocked full of seductive arched backs, legs spread wide, and hands gliding up our thighs. At the end of the class, the instructor announced that the next

week we would add clothing removal, specifically learning to take off our bras. I was stunned. I didn't know if I could do that in front of people, let alone on a stage.

Our moving schedule prevented me from attending the next class, but at least I had learned some of the basic movements and concepts of burlesque. Once established in Albuquerque, I located a hot yoga studio near our house and found a home belly dancing with a local troupe led by a wonderful woman named Jennifer. But my real interest was in continuing with burlesque. In late April, I was flipping through the local paper and discovered a burlesque show. I managed to talk Ben into attending (it wasn't hard, actually). The headliners were Trixie Little and The Evil Hate Monkey, an internationally recognized acrobatic striptease duet then based in Baltimore.³

The performances that evening embraced a dizzying array of styles, including classic striptease, performance art, comedy sketch, satire and a wide variety of dance styles. Trixie and Monkey, both circus-trained, performed a duet to "Total Eclipse of the Heart" incorporating acrobatic poses, perfect comedic timing and melodramatic acting as they pulled off each other's clothes, hitting all of the beats and every refrain of "turn around" in this truly overwrought song. One of the most memorable moments was when Monkey, who is a little shorter than Trixie, jumped up and straddled her waist, and then they each leaned backward into a balance. Trixie then melted into a back bend while Monkey straddled her and did a bump and grind; the audience howled as he straddled her face. Still holding her backbend as Monkey walked behind her to face the crowd, Trixie supported his entire body weight as he leaned over her and wrapped his arms around her torso, lifting himself into an arm stand. Trixie wore high heels throughout the entire performance and never even quaked. I was breathless.

Continuing with the humorous streak of burlesque, local performer General Blackery presented an act to Rick James' song "Mary Jane," which involved pulling a bag of white powder out from between her legs, then tossing that in favor of a joint she artfully extracted from her bra and then seductively smearing a brownie (also stashed in her bra)

on her face. But for me, the hook of the evening was a campy and fun hula-girl number performed by a local troupe, Burlesque Noir. They were smart, amusing and sexy. Ben and I were instant burlesque fans, and I wanted to join the troupe, so I signed up for the mailing list and received notice of a class in July on twirling pasties.

Sitting here on the day before my forty-eighth birthday in a class with Miss Indigo Blue, the Reigning Queen of Burlesque, and the ladies of Burlesque Noir, I look down at the first pair of pasties covering my nipples. I can't help but smile with satisfaction that they twirl.



On the Saturday after the tassel-twirling class, Ben and I head up to Santa Fe for the International Folk Art Market, a colorful open-air affair with hundreds of artisans from all over the world. I am particularly drawn to the tribal style Tuareg jewelry (Ben discreetly purchases a piece I admire for my birthday) and the Mexican silver filigree earrings. We promise ourselves that some year we will come home with one of the rugs from the Uzbekistan weavers.

After a day of unpacking and settling in to our new home, Sunday night finds us needing a night out. We decide to check out the rooftop bar of the Hotel Parq Central, with its unparalleled views of the Albuquerque skyline. Originally a hospital and later a psychiatric facility, this Italianate structure retains its original grace with columns and tilework edging the tall windows. Curled into the comfy outdoor sofa, we wait for sunset, which at this time of year starts a little after 8 o'clock. Sipping expensive cocktails while watching the sun disappear on the horizon and slide below the curve of the earth, we bask in the cooling night air of twilight and our shared bliss.

ENDNOTES



1 Read Rachel Shteir, *Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 97 for more details.

2 Watch a video documenting the journey of some of Indigo Blue's students (www.winkthemovie.com) and find out about the Academy of Burlesque in Seattle at www.academyofburlesque.com.

3 See more about Trixie Little and Monkey at www.trixielittle.com.

4 For more about canales and New Mexican architecture, see Allen G. Noble's *Traditional Buildings: A Global Survey of Structural Forms and Cultural Functions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 164.

5 Facebook post by Jo Weldon, n.d.

6 See Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (www.imlportfolio.usc.edu/ctcs505/mulveyVisualPleasureNarrativeCinema.pdf)

7 The New Mexican spelling is derived from the Portuguese orthography, hence the missing "r" after the first "u."

8 See Hull S, Fayek M, Mathien FJ, and Roberts H. "Turquoise trade of the Ancestral Puebloan: Chaco and beyond," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35: 1355-60.

9 Additional information is available at "America's Poorest States," 24/7 Wall St., last modified September 20, 2012, accessed August 20, 2015, www.247wallst.com/special-report/2012/09/20/americas-poorest-states-2/2/

10 The concept was first laid out in the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, paraphrased as "That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above, corresponds to that which

is Below, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing.” See full text at “Emerald Tablet of Hermes,” Internet Sacret Text Archive, accessed September 14, 2015, www.sacred-texts.com/alc/emerald.htm.

11 The instructor’s name is Jennifer Berezan, and you can read more about her at her website, www.edgeofwonder.com.

12 Explore the Sheelas in Barbara Freitag’s *Sheila-na-gigs: Unravelling an Enigma* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

13 See *The Rachel Maddow Show, September 11, 2011*.

14 See “Oppression” in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* by Marilyn Frye (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1983).

15 See Spencer A. Rathus, Jeffrey S. Nevid, and Lois Fichner-Rathus, *Human Sexuality in a World of Diversity*, 8th ed. (Pearson, 2010).

16 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 77.

17 See Lisa M. Diamond, “Female Biseuxality From Adolescence to Adulthood: Results From a 10-Year Longitudinal Study,” *Developmental Psychology* 44, no. 1 (2008): 5-14, doi:10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.5, www.psych.utah.edu/people/files/diamond54a5.pdf; www.nbcnews.com/id/22809222/ns/health-sexual_health/t/women-bisexuality-may-not-be-just-phase/#.U491BPldWM4; and supplemental statistics in Leonard Sax, “Why Are So Many Girls Lesbian or Bisexual?” *Psychology Today*, April 3, 2010, accessed August 20, 2015, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sax-sex/201004/why-are-so-many-girls-lesbian-or-bisexual.

18 Excerpts taken from Robert Shore-Goss, “Dis/Grace-full Incarnation and the Dis/Grace-full Church: Marcella Althaus-Reid’s Vision of Radical Inclusivity” in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010)1-16.

19 Facebook post by Vivienne Vermuth, n.d.

20 For more information about the Zia Pueblo people, see www.zia.com/home/zia_info.html, accessed August 2, 2015.

21 I had a phone conversation with Robert Medina, Tribal Attorney for the Zia Pueblo, at 11:35 am on July 24, 2015. Based on this conversation, the facts are clear: In the 1880s the first husband and wife anthropology team, James and Matilda Stevenson, were conducting ethnographic surveys of a number of Pueblo peoples, including the Zia. According to Medina, James Stevenson (nicknamed “Stimmie” by the Zia) attended a water ritual in which a ceremonial pot was used. Stevenson asked to purchase the pot, but was refused. Either he, or someone in his camp, stole the pot and it became part of the collection at the Museum of Anthropology in Santa Fe. James Stevenson died in 1888 in the midst of preparing the ethnographic information on the Zia. His wife finished the work.

22 For a description of the pot and an oral history of the Zia, see Office of the State Historian, “The Zia Sun Symbol,” videos, accessed July 24, 2015, www.newmexicohistory.org/multimedia/videos/the-zia-sun-symbol. A photograph of the pot is available at Reed Upton, “Zia Pueblo Receiving Money for Use of Sun Symbol, The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, December 2, 2005, accessed July 24, 2015, www.nathpo.org/News/Legal/News-Legal_Issues27.html.

23 The news story can be found at www.cnjonline.com/2015/04/20/official-zia-change-issue-of-respect (accessed July 24, 2015).

24 Thanks to Ann Filemyr of Southwest College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for information about the Pueblo culture and help with deepening this section of the book. See more about Southwest College at www.swc.edu.

25 An interesting article on cultural appropriation and belly dance, which sums up many of the issues, is Shasta Daisy McCarty,



Dear Reader:

It's wonderful to have you come along on this adventure! This memoir is revealing, on so many levels, but topics are important. I think culture has attempted to regulate and control the natural fluidity and grandeur of women's sexuality, and each of us travels a different road to re-claim it, in our own unique fashion.

I'd love to hear what you think of *Burlesque, Yoga, Sex and Love* and your own path. Leave a review on Amazon or Barnes and Noble; your comments are always inspiring! You can find me on Facebook (www.facebook.com/annekeyABQ) and on Goodreads (www.goodreads.com/author/show/5268582.Annie_Key) or on my website (www.annekey.net).

Remember: ***Shine bright like the star that you are!***

~ Anne



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anne Key wants to live in a world where women are wild, knees don't age, the fragrance of flowers fills the air, and we all love—and are loved for being—exactly who we are.

Anne's first memoir *Desert Priestess* recounts her time as the Priestess of the Temple of Goddess Spirituality Dedicated to Sekhmet in Nevada. She co-edited *Heart of the Sun: An Anthology in Exaltation of Sekhmet* and *Stepping Into Ourselves: An Anthology of Writings on Priestesses*. She performs with the nationally recognized troupe *Burlesque Noir* in Albuquerque, New Mexico under the stage name *Annie O'Roar*. She teaches under the name *Dr. Key* as an adjunct faculty offering courses in women's studies, religious studies, and English. As well as writing, she is also the co-founder of the independent press *Goddess Ink* (www.goddess-ink.com).

Anne blissfully resides in Albuquerque with her husband, his three cats and her snake. When she's not writing or grading papers, you can find her pushing taffeta through a sewing machine or strapping on her heels for rehearsal.

Follow her shenanigans at www.annekey.net.

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