

Get Your Word On

Introducing a new literary column from James River Writers

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This week, we called up Susan Reinhardt, author of the quirky new memoir, "Not Tonight, Honey: Wait 'Til I'm a Size 6." As an award-winning humor columnist for the Asheville Citizen-Times and syndicated columnist "Can We Talk?" for Gannett newspapers, Reinhardt's work has appeared in over 100 publications to include the Washington Post, Chicago Sun, Newsday, and Woman's World. On Monday, April 11, Reinhardt will be reading from her spunky new memoir at the Fountain Bookstore.

But first, James River Writers called her up at her home in Asheville, NC, to get the "skinny" on boob jobs, her wacky family life and everything else that inspired "Not Tonight Honey: Wait 'Til I'm a Size 6."

James River Writers: How did you get started writing?

Susan Reinhardt: I grew up in a small town in Georgia. When I was in middle school, I had giant ears like Ross Perot and buck teeth. Let me tell you, I was a prime candidate for bullying. Kids would bray like a mule when I walked by them. So I started keeping a journal as an outlet for my middle school angst. After school I would sneak up to a tiny unfinished room over the garage and write by myself where I had light and privacy. Then when I was in high school, I wrote plays for class whenever I could.

I decided to go to nursing school to have a secure job. After working for two years as a nurse, I decided to go back to journalism school for another two years to get my degree. Yes, I went from head-enema-giver to journalism. I counted them once – I gave 15 enemas in one day. When I was a nurse, I found I got too attached to the patients. I cared too much.

I started as a reporter for the Asheville Citizen-Times and worked into writing some feature stories. They asked me to write a human interest column which ended up winning Best of Gannett in the newspaper chain. I have been writing it now for nine years. It comes out three times a week in Asheville, and is available for Gannett to run nationally as the "Can We Talk?" column. Also lots of authors including Laurie Notaro and Jill Connor Browne, along with Ronda Rich who was a great mentor, have inspired me to keep on writing.

JRW: Where did you get the idea for your book, "Not Tonight, Honey: Wait 'Til I'm a Size 6?"

SR: The book is a wacky memoir, a collection of different humorous stories on aging

semi-gracefully with Merlot and benevolent madness. I've gone from Miss to Ma'am in ten years. I got the idea from friends who kept telling me I had the most hilarious stories and encouraging me to write them down in a 'tell all' book. I tell all about my boob job -- and my sister's. Breastfeeding and mammograms turned them into Bassett ears, mine were so downwardly mobile that I had to duct tape them at the pool. Once another woman spotted my duct tape, I had to do something about it. But I felt so guilty about spending so much money on them that I decided to sponsor a child from Guatemala for the same amount of money. That's why I like to think of myself as naughty but nice, but I am really not that naughty.

"Not Tonight, Honey..." tells men how to get lucky in love and life – by picking up Tilex and chicken on the way home from work. There is nothing sexier than a man who cooks, vacuums, and changes a diaper. There is another section on Hollywood – I have a friend who goes there twice a year and stays in Julia Roberts' room from "Pretty Woman." She politely approaches movie stars – she even flew to Tahiti to find Marlon Brando. There is another section on my mother putting her mausoleum on VISA to get the Frequent Flyer miles and my grandmother who took up smoking at age 80 in a nursing home and would hide cigarettes in her bra. This kind of stuff happens to me but not to everyone. But not all of it is funny. There are several poignant reflections on sending kids to preschool for the first time and losing a child. Heck, even my father who is a part-time Southern Baptist minister approved it. At first he wasn't going to tell his congregation about it at all.

JRW: You have been called "the Southern Belle's answer to David Sedaris." How do you feel about that?

SR: David Sedaris is one of my favorites, so I am thrilled! If he wasn't gay, I would ask for his hand in marriage – I love him! I look up to him and Laurie Notaro so much. The cover of my book is actually a parody of "Dress Your Family in Corduroy" with a Barbie on the cover dressed in pink. I loved Erma Bombeck and Louis Grizzard who both have passed away. I was honored to win Erma Bombeck Writer of the Month. Must have been slim pickings that month.

JRW: I see that you were nominated for a Pulitzer for your column. Can you tell us what that was like?

SR: I was really flattered but didn't expect to win. My top priority right now is raising a middle school boy, so he doesn't end up in juvie.

JRW: You have written an award-winning newspaper column that is available to 100 newspapers, two novels, and now "Not Tonight, Honey..." What type of writing do you enjoy the most?

SR: I enjoy all kinds of narrative storytelling - nonfiction, humorous nonfiction, and fiction -- quirky Southern fiction and chick lit.

JRW: I am curious. This is your third book, right? Does it get any easier?

SR: Writing is never easy. I haven't written in a while, so my hands feel frozen. It is like once you quit exercising – you feel like a melting candle. I am a pretty down-to-earth person, so I try to keep it all in perspective. You never know what is going to happen.

JRW: What do you think is the biggest misconception about writers?

SR: That they are rich! Unless you are Steven King or JK Rowling, you are nowhere near rich. You only get eight percent of your sales. It's a myth based on the top few. The other myth is that anyone can do it. Writing is tricky, and it requires a lot of discipline. It's easy to say you are a writer. It's a lot harder to be one.

JRW: Any advice for struggling writers out there?

SR: Read everything you can in the genre you want to write in. And e-mail the authors! Authors are happy to hear from readers. You'll be surprised - even big names will respond. It's a great way to network. Keep writing! Don't skip a day, even if it is 12 to two a.m., my usual time to write.

Susan Reinhardt
Fountain Bookstore
Monday, April 11
6:30 p.m.

James River Writers (JRW) is a nonprofit, Richmond, Virginia-based group of professional writers and friends of literature who have joined to promote the art of writing and the love of books in Central Virginia. Their aim is to encourage readers and aspiring writers, and to spur awareness of contemporary authors and their work. For more information about James River Writers, visit www.jamesriverwriters.com.

You can e-mail Susan at Susan@SusanReinhardt.com and check out her website at www.susanreinhardt.com. Finding that book clubs are the “bridge clubs of yesterday,” she has also offered to do phone interviews for book clubs.