

Q & A WITH LIONEL WALFISH

Q. According to your bio, you have had a lot of chance encounters with famous people. What was it like to be all alone in an elevator with Marilyn Monroe?

Unforgettable! I was visiting friends who lived in the same apartment where Marilyn used to stay when she was in Manhattan. I was already in the elevator when she stepped in, and was immediately taken aback by her beauty—absolutely stunning! What I remember most vividly about her, besides the fact that she was so agitated about being late, is that the dress she wore exposed her shoulders which were covered in freckles.

Q. Your bio also says that you were personal assistant to designer Anne Klein. How was that experience?

Never a dull moment. If you have ever seen or read *The Devil Wears Prada*, you have an idea of the atmosphere of that office. Of course, Anne was not as demanding as the Meryl Streep character in the movie, but she had her moments.

Q. For example?

Anne was a great designer, but she was also smart—street smart. I recall in 1961, a buyer came from Paris to her New York showroom. Anne immediately came over to me and said, “Turn up the heat—all the way,” which of course I did. After a few minutes the room became so unbearably hot that Anne suggested the buyer take off the jacket she was wearing. Anne handed the jacket to me and whispered, “Take this to the design department and have them sketch it as fast as they can.” By the time the jacket was returned to the French buyer, Anne had a leg up on the new fashions for 1962!

Q. What inspired you to write the stories in *Lillian on Sunday*? Are any of them autobiographical?

There is a kernel of my own experience in each of my stories. I write about everything I’ve ever seen or heard or felt. Of course, the sequence of events and the characters I write about are all my own creations.

Q. You’ve traveled a lot in your life and lived in many places. Where and when were these stories written?

I’ve been writing stories since I was a teenager in Montreal. I published my first story in a magazine when I was just 15 for which I was paid \$5. I still remember the feeling of awe I experienced the day that \$5 bill came in the mail. My new book, *Lillian on Sunday*, is a compilation of most of my mature work. The earliest story in the collection, *Lepidoptera*, I wrote as a young man while living in Paris back in 1964. The most recent, *The Gates to Heaven*, I completed in 2020 in Toronto when I was 82.

Q. What is unique about your writing style compared to other short story writers?

I like to give my readers stories of differing moods, styles and lengths. Some of my stories are very short vignettes, describing a moment in time--almost like a photo--and then everything is turned upside down with a surprise ending, revealing a new way of seeing. In all of my stories, I focus on creating characters I hope will live beyond the page. Many of the people I write about are flawed individuals forced to face a reckoning, sometimes in a dark and ironically humorous way.

Q. You've been experiencing some very serious and grueling health problems recently. What words of advice do you have for authors writing and publishing in a similar situation challenged by health or age?

I am hardly the first or last author to be faced with their own mortality, but my illness has certainly given me the impetus to see this final project to completion. I urge older writers to never give up sharing their visions, even if the adversities of age or poor health become overwhelming. The satisfaction they will ultimately reap is the greatest reward.

For more information about Lionel Walfish and his book, *Lillian on Sunday*, please visit www.lionelwalfish.com.