

MOVIES; Getting by on indie dreams;

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Lynn Isenberg, 42, came here to make movies that would force people to reevaluate their lives. But she wound up, for a few weird years, as an iconoclastic adult-film screenwriter -- one who cared as much about **plot** as **sex**. Today she's a novelist, promoting a semi-autobiographical comedy-drama about a woman whose scripts give adult flicks temporary integrity.

A novel approach.

Isenberg loved writing as a child. She grew up in white-collar Bloomfield Hills, went to the University of Michigan, majored in English and film studies and headed to L.A. in the 1980s to become a screenwriter and producer. She got a job with the literary arm of Creative Artists Agency, got a co-producer credit on the Lawrence Kasdan comedy "I Love You to Death," and worked on her own screenplays.

She also fell in love with a cult-favorite novel about friendship and loss, **Lynn** Sharon Schwartz's "Disturbances in the Field." She optioned it several times at a total cost of about \$50,000 and set about developing it for the screen. It would be the first project she controlled from start to finish. "I really thought that it would help people deal with grief; the whole reason I became a writer was to help inspire people, to give them another way of seeing."

But she could never close the deal: The well-known actress who loved it backed off in favor of a new project; the Oscar-winning screenwriter she'd lined up had to return to another film at a producer's insistence; the nonlinear screenplay was, she suggests, ahead of its time.

After five years of reversals she was running out of money. So she called an old Detroit friend who had worked at PBS but was now with the Playboy Channel. Write me a soft-core script, he said. She responded with what became known as "Things Change," the story of a woman who leaves her female partner to explore her **sexual** identity.

Unbeknownst to her, Playboy co-financed the script with an adult-film company, which made a far more explicit version. (No extra speaking parts needed, just more **sex**.) Also unbeknownst to her, the film's relatively sophisticated dialogue got considerable attention in the adult-film world and numerous nominations in the annual Adult Video News competition. "It allows its characters a dignity heretofore unequalled in adult entertainment," one reviewer said in 1993. Isenberg was asked to write another script. And another. She negotiated her own four-picture deal with another adult-film company, making \$2,500 to \$5,000 per script. She cast and

wrote a **sex**-ed video for couples. She was, at different times, surprised by what she was doing but determined to go with the flow. "This was where I was at this moment in time. I was going to be open-minded ... I let go of control."

Isenberg kept telling a fellow writer about her experiences, and the friend, who found them hysterical, kept prodding her to turn them into a novel. After she quit adult scripting in 1996 for a career in New Media, Isenberg went back to Detroit in 2001 and knocked out "My Life Uncovered" in a couple of months. Her protagonist, Laura Taylor, loses her dream screenplay deal when her agent vanishes and she accepts an adult-entertainment offer to pay her bills. Like Isenberg, Laura tries to reconcile the gulf between her ambitions and her new career as she listens to her rabbi's Shabbat morning services. Like Isenberg, Laura pens an introspective line of dialogue about her inability to trust men that, when her father sees the film, helps heal the estrangement between them.

The first publisher Isenberg approached, New York and Toronto-based Red Dress Ink, which specializes in "chick lit," bought the novel and printed an initial run of 70,000 copies in December. The book has enjoyed favorable Internet reviews (as well as applause from the Jewish Journal). Isenberg says she is sifting through TV and film adaptation offers while working on her next novel.

Funny, she tells the other women from Detroit, she came to Hollywood to be a filmmaker and wound up the novelist she'd wanted to be at 8. They agree publishing is less barbaric. Like an agent once told her, Isenberg says, "the difference is, in Hollywood they want to kill you; in the publishing business, they just get bitchy." Funny, too, how you wind up paying homage to your elders. Isenberg tells them that a great aunt was an author, and that next month she'll return to Bloomfield Hills to address an annual meeting of immigrants from her great aunt's native town, David Horodok, in what is now Belarus.

"When they asked me," Isenberg says, "I said, 'Maybe I should talk about storytelling, and how traditional storytelling carries on ... ' and the woman on the phone said, 'No, you don't understand. You have to talk about porn. They're expecting it. I think we're gonna have the biggest turnout yet.' "

People tell Isenberg, who is single, that despite her Detroit roots, she reminds them of a New Yorker, in a Sarah Jessica Parker-as-Carrie Bradshaw way. And the image fits as she puts a copy of "Things Change" into her Marina del Rey condo's DVD and tries to locate a moment of dialogue between the two female stars that she's proud of. She has to keep skipping around, and every time she does there's -- whoops -- another graphic **sex** scene. "Oh God," she apologizes earnestly to her guest, "I'm so sorry."

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