

# What are you reading?

COMPILED BY FAYOLA SHAKES

## PR consultant uses books to build her ideal lifestyle

This week, Delray Beach resident Karen Lustgarten discusses the books that have taught her how to plan for and create her lifestyle, instead of trying to wish it into existence.



Lustgarten

Lustgarten is a public relations consultant and counts Planned Parenthood of South Palm Beach and Broward Counties as her primary client.

“You have to be a news junkie in this field and politically astute because changes in legislation about restrictions on reproductive health and rights hit on a daily basis,” she said.

A Hollywood, Calif., native, Lustgarten once lived in a house “several hundred yards below the H” in the Hollywood sign, she said. She jokes that she moved to South Florida to get away from traffic woes and gridlock.

**Q. What does reading mean to you?**

**A.** I can’t function without reading, whether for work or interest in a subject or for fun. Reading is part of daily living. You get up, get washed, get dressed and you read.

**Q. Are there any books that were influential in shaping your early life or subsequent career?**

**A.** Indeed. In my mid-20s, I read all the volumes of *The Diary of Anais Nin*. When I finished, I wanted her life — a writer surrounded by talented artists and fascinating intellectuals. The next week, I read *How I Found Freedom in an Unfree World: A Handbook for Personal Liberty* by Harry Browne. Nin’s diaries inspired

me to think about the life I wanted; Browne’s book said just do it, you only have one life. With that potent combination, my husband at the time and I packed a picnic lunch, a blanket, a notebook and Browne’s book and went to a park to write down what became the design plan for our future. A few weeks later, we left our government jobs, rode off into the sunset and started new careers. The journey was fascinating and successful beyond our expectations.

**Q. When do you do most of your reading?**

**A.** Mornings start with coffee, the local papers and online articles that are work related. Books and magazines are reserved for weekends.

**Q. Do you have favorite authors?**

**A.** A few years ago I was introduced to Pat Conroy’s books and he has become my favorite author. He wrote *Beach Music*, *The Prince of Tides*, *The Citadel* and *The Water is Wide*. I also love James Dickey, the Southern poet.

**Q. What are you reading?**

**A.** I finished two books by friends recently released: one by Delray Beach author Arnold Goldstein called *So Sue Me*. It’s about how to protect your assets from lawsuits. I never would have believed this subject could be riveting, but I could not put the book down. The other is *Code Name God* by Mani Bhaumik.

It’s the culmination of his fascinating life and life’s work as an enlightened scientist. It makes you think about hope, science and his logical conclusion of what “God” is. I wrote a mini review of the book on Amazon.

Finally, I just read *The Sweet Potato Queens’ Book of Love* by Jill Conner Browne (no relation to Harry). What a

joyous read by a beguiling woman with a fabulous sense of humor. I’ve started *Nickel and Dime* by Barbara Ehrenreich and want to read her new one next, *Bait and Switch*.

**Q. Are you a book browser and do you go to bookstores or the library?**

**A.** I’m Alice in Wonderland in bookstores. Being an eclectic, I have to stop and read every cover and flip through books on subjects that catch my fancy. I could spend a whole day in one bookstore and think only an hour has passed.

**Q. Have you ever considered writing your autobiography?**

**A.** Funny you should ask. I’ve been writing reflective essays about life for the past two decades. My favorite writing is about life as it happens. These essays started as communiqués to friends around the country when I found myself in the middle of some major events and social movements.

Occasionally they ask if I will put the essays together in a book. It’s a body of work, half sitting in a file cabinet (pre-computers) and half on computer, and it’s quite a job to organize and fill in holes of time with more writing, so I kept putting it off.

Last month, I wrote the opening chapter of the book for a film editor in Los Angeles. He said it was a “cliffhanger” and would make a terrific movie. That was all the impetus I needed to get cracking.

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