

B O O K S

Sex and The City Author Candace Bushnell

At the Core of the Big Apple

by Iris Wiener

She knows her sex and she knows her city, but more than anything, she knows her words. A proven connoisseur when it comes to the highs and lows of relationships and living the high life in the Big Apple, Candace Bushnell has created and inspired some of the most intriguing characters and stories of the past decade. With her hit novel *Trading Up* in paperback and a new novel on the way, the real-life *Sex and the City*-beloved Carrie Bradshaw reflects on the whirlwind that has brought her and her fictionalized counterparts into the limelight.

In 1994, the *New York Observer* brought Bushnell into its pages after she approached them with a number of her ideas. "I went in armed with a couple of ideas for pieces and they liked one of them, but they didn't pay anything. They said I could write the piece but I had to pay for my own expenses. So I really took a gamble, because I thought it would be a great piece and it worked out, they loved it," she remembers. After a year of digging for great story ideas, Bushnell was rewarded with her own column: *Sex and*



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But Bushnell says that she is in no way similar to Janey, and this has been proven in her ambitious efforts since running away to New York to become an actress. "I thought I could support myself as a writer by maybe getting TV commercials," Bushnell moans as she remembers her auditions. "I thought I'd get a call back from Burger King, but I was actually really bad!"

After graduating from New York University with a number of internships and writing samples under her belt, Bushnell was ready to give the professional writing world a run for its money. Only one thing stood in her way. "I went on an interview for a magazine where there were a lot of male editors and I just wasn't

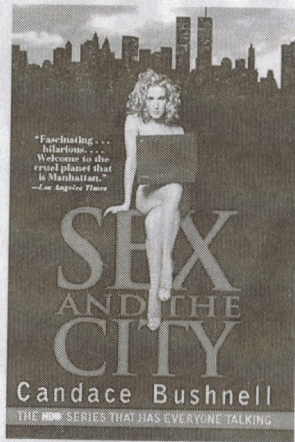
Candace Bushnell

can be beginning for you."

She laughs sarcastically as she remembers some of the ageist comments she's heard. "Everybody gets older. It's really easy when you're in your twenties or early thirties to believe that you're never going to be old, never going to be in your forties and have that sort of arrogance. But believe me, the day will come when you are in your forties."

Bushnell tends to write about the glamorously wealthy culture of New York, one in which many Americans will never find themselves. But the author points out that people always have interest in the seemingly "untouchable." "I think people are fascinated by the rich and famous. Most of us are not Brad and Jen, who live in an elite world," she considers thoughtfully. "I write about the underside of glamour, and this is the kind of stuff that goes on behind closed doors. The kind of stuff you don't see on *Entertainment Tonight*."

The racy sex scenes found in the pages of her books and in the lives of the SATC women definitely wouldn't be found on *Entertainment Tonight*. In fact, they've led



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many people to the conclusion that these women are "sluts" and "whores" and nothing more. "Women certainly do judge other women, sometimes harshly and unfairly so, and for me, I think my books do play in this kind of subconscious judgment that we as women make about other women," Bushnell says with slight disdain. "That's a mistake, and I think that's something that women have to get over. That's something we do in high school. And I think for women to really succeed, to be the best that we could be, we need to stop being judgmental about other women," she says, smiling at the thought.

With brilliant work behind her and more books on the way (the first of which will be out in 2005), does Bushnell consider herself successful? "I feel there are things I set out to do, and I'm doing them. So I don't think I am successful or not successful," she says as she reflects on what lies ahead. "I kind of think more of what I have to do. To other people, I may be successful," she trails off contentedly. "To me, I just feel like I'm working and I'm doing what I've worked hard for my whole life." ♦

the City (SATC). "We always said that the column would have one foot in sex and one foot in society." A major hit by its six-month birthday, movie companies were already taking notice, and in 1996, *Sex and the City* became a smash book chronicling the relationships of New York's cultural elite.

As Bushnell worked on *SATC*, the persona of the irresistible Janey Wilcox began to take shape. Janey would soon become the star of Bushnell's provocative novel *Four Blondes*, a novel that tells the story of four fair-haired, wealthy Manhattanites on very different emotional planes. "Janey was a particular type of woman that I had seen at parties, and whom I have observed out and about in New York society for years, and I was always kind of fascinated by this woman. If this were 100 years ago in Paris, she'd be a courtesan!" says Bushnell of the promiscuous, but likable idiosyncrasies of her leading lady.

She decided to take Janey's journey further with *Trading Up*, a novel solely dedicated to the socialite's plight in climbing the prestigious social ladder that pre-eminently towers over New York City. "The bottom line with Janey's character is that she is a survivor. I always say that you could find a Janey Wilcox in a trailer park; she's the kind of person that's always trying to get into a bigger trailer," Bushnell laughs. "She's a woman who we all know. She does and says things that we all think about doing, but will never do. So you're always fascinated by what she'll do next, but you also think, 'Oh my god, I would never do that!' People have told me that when they're reading the book, they'll say out loud, 'No, Janey don't do that!' She's a character you love, you hate, or you love to hate."

walking in and a male writer said, 'A writer with a portfolio? I've never seen anything like that.' And he just sneered at me. So in those days, in the early '80s, publishing was sexist. Women weren't considered serious writers then. If you were an attractive woman, then forget about it, no male writer or editor was really going to take you seriously."

When Darren Star created *Sex and the City* for HBO, Bushnell showed the ignorant higher-ups of her past a thing or two about creativity and the strength of women. "The show was pretty outside of the box, it was definitely something new and different. The very fact that it was about single women in their thirties – nobody had written about that in a long time," says Bushnell, who obviously felt close to the material seeing as much of the show was a distorted mirror of her own life. "I had my own Mr. Big and my Samantha-type girlfriend who were very inspiring, and I suppose I had my Charlotte and my Miranda. But I actually have lots of girlfriends. New York is a real women's town, and because it's the city where women tend to get married later, there is really a lot of support amongst women."

Age is an evident detail in all of her work, and the 45-year-old wants to make a few things clear. "If you really know yourself when you get to be in your forties, there's a comfort level there. The other thing is, these days, a lot of 40-year-old women are just as sexy and just as good-looking as women in their twenties. New York City is full of gorgeous women who are better looking in their forties than they were when they were younger, because they have the self-confidence. Good attitude helps, too. When you get to be in your forties, a lot of new things