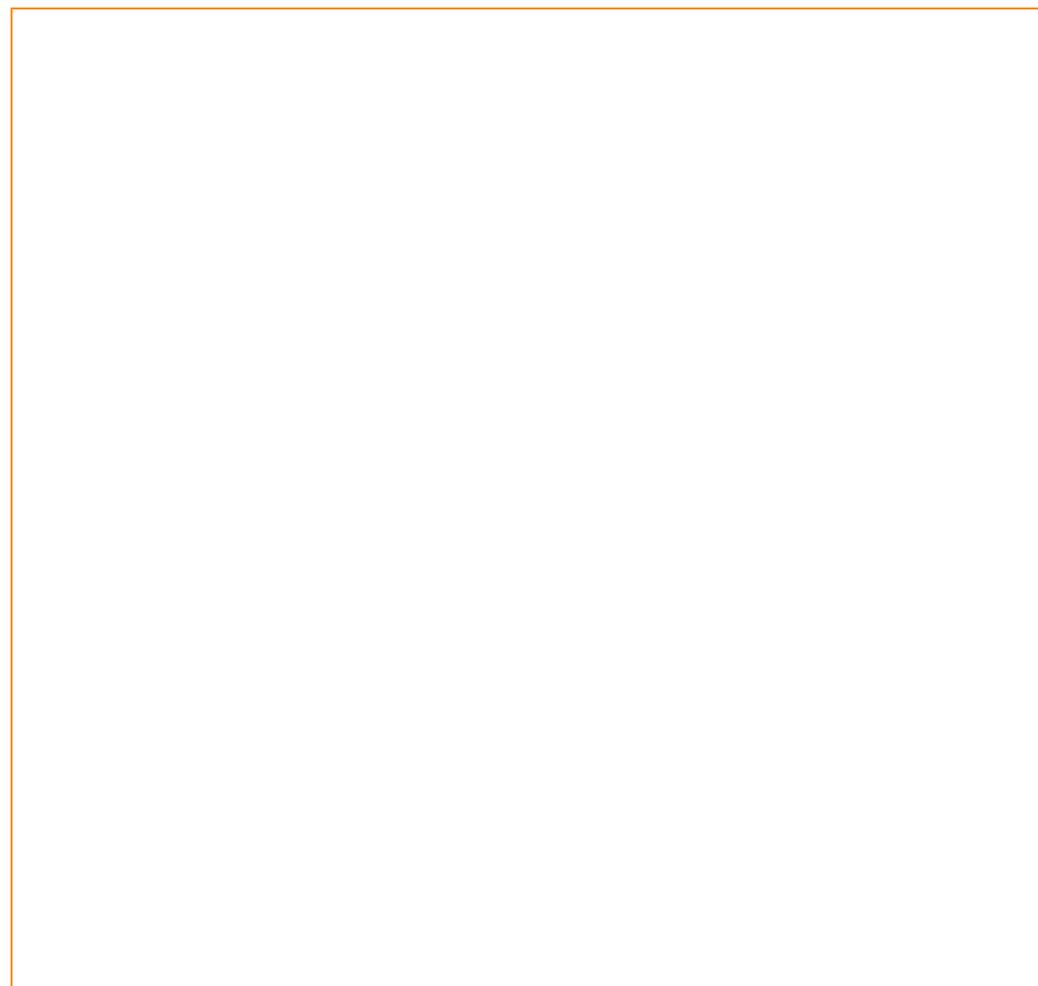


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Come in...and be captivated...

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Tracey Jackson headshot; <http://www.traceyjacksononline.com/>

*In this winter edition, we talk life with screenwriter and author, Tracey Jackson. I loved interviewing Tracey. It was actually the editor's (my daughter's) idea because I was going through the mid-50's blues and Nicole came to me and said "Mom, you've got to read this great new book, *Between a Rock and a Hot Place*." I loved the humor in the title but I would come to find that Tracey is more than funny- her wit extends to her wisdom and keen insights. I was fortunate enough to enjoy the scope of her body of work including all her films, her latest book and her documentary about mothers and daughters, *Lucky Ducks*. In all of her work she finds a way to bring*

important messages to people in way that they can identify with.

Tracey Jackson has been a hugely successful screenwriter for the last seventeen years. Her most recent films include The Other End of the Line, Confessions of a Shopaholic and her documentary, Lucky Ducks, which she both produced and directed. She has a blog entitled, "Tracey Talks" on her website where she can speak out on significant world issues or just make us laugh with her observations. Between a Rock and a Hot Place is her first book.

There's a quote on her blog by Linda Sheridan which sums up the way I came to feel about Tracey and her meaningful perspectives: "Godspeed to all who are making a positive difference in this world."

Interview with Tracey Jackson by Denise Bouchard

1) I recently read this profound quote by Helen Mirren: "I don't worry about roles for women in drama. I worry about roles for women in the world." Your new book, *Between a Rock and a Hot Place*, cautions women to make sure that they clear a path for themselves, carve out a space in the career of their choice, and put themselves first when pursuing a passion. As a successful writer, an accomplished professional in a male-dominated field of comedy screenwriting, what would your advice be to a young woman starting out today in any profession?

I actually worry about the roles of all people in today's world, but focusing on women, women have always had a harder go of it. That is nothing new--we have to be smarter, more alert, and better at whatever it is we do than our male counterparts to get even within reach of where they are. If I were to advise young women, which being the mother of daughters I do all the time, I would say first off, find something you love to do. Find something that absorbs you and makes you want to leap out of bed in the morning. And then perfect it. If whatever it is is not a money-making venture, then do have something to fall back on. In my day it was typing, and now I would advise young women to do something along the lines of social media, or something that can translate into a job, that translates into earning money, that translates into independence. Money is not the be all end all, but we do need it to live. Many women make many poor choices or are forced into lives they don't want to live because they have to support themselves and often

their children. So independence is a great thing to have. You are then not obligated to your parents, or a man, or anyone. Sometimes you have to do things you don't love in order to have this, in which case I say, do what you love on the side. Hobbies will often lead to your work in the Plan B stage in your life.

The other thing I suggest to everyone is to really think about what you want your life to look like. By this I don't mean what you want your home to look like, though that is in there too, but what you want from your life starting at wherever you are, trying, as hard as it might be, to envision it through eighty. You will then make choices accordingly. One of the biggest complaints I hear from women of all ages is they don't know what they want. You must know, you must take the time to figure it out. For the lucky it comes and knocks on their door. For the really lucky it drags them by the hair. But for most, it is a discovery process. And if you wait for it to knock, it may be a lifetime of Waiting for Godot--and you don't want that. But if you know you want children, add that to the list and don't wake up at forty-two and go 'now'.

I knew when I wanted my kids and what I had to give up to have them. I had a plan and it has proven to be a good thing. You will get thrown some curve balls, and you may change your course, but better to change a course than not have a course to change from.

2) You use a Virginia Woolf quote in your book that I loved: "Arrange whatever pieces come your way." You then talk about how you were initially scrounging around in your past and coming up with worn out pieces that had seen their day and no longer fit and then trying to find new pieces. You then go on to say that this is one of the giant lessons in adapting to age without losing your mind. I think this is an extremely important thing to take into account in this period of life. What do you have around you, what are you good at, what are you dealing with that could become a project to help others, and how could you make it all into a metaphorical quilt in a sense to keep you warm for the next half of your life? I love how you show us by example how you did just that with the documentary, *Lucky Ducks*, portraying the difficulties and rewards of raising a teenager and expanding her consciousness about the world around her. After you read the book, *The Price of Privilege*, you took the pieces around you to give us a glimpse into the life of a privileged child in today's world. It takes courage to say to your child, 'I want you to see what's going on in the slums of Mumbai

and I want you to work there with those children.’ This was an amazing odyssey and gave such a personal look into your life which you openly shared with us. I love the people you met along the way whom you interviewed; especially the guru in India who told you that your daughter needed you to be her friend at that moment. I know in past generations that was hardly advised but I always disagreed with that and feel that it is important to be your child’s friend and yet still be their parent; it’s a fine balance to strike but perhaps the most essential element and keeps them coming home more than their favorite home-cooked meals. In the years since, how did your experience in India with your daughter affect your relationship and the parent-child relationships of those who saw the film and shared their reactions with you?

That is an interesting question. Like many things in life it changed over time. When we made the film she was still in the “everything I did was annoying stage.” And I think she resented me for putting our life, and much of her life, on parade. Then when it got a lot of public attention she was very mixed, as we both took some huge body blows when it came to comments. We still do. It is such a controversial film and people either love it and us, or hate it and one of us. I don’t know how it affects those who see it. I do get emails from people who say it has helped them. Some people see it and are scared by it, as I force them to look at their own lives in a way they would rather avoid. Those are the haters I think. You put a piece of work out there and you sort of have to let it go. People will look at it through the scrim of their own lives and you have no control over this. I do know little kids love it. And that is because of its honesty. Kids love honesty. That is something parents forget. One of the points I was trying to get across is that everyone likes to paint a rosy picture of what their life is like, and this is usually far from reality. I think it’s destructive in two ways. Firstly, it teaches the people and their kids who are usually forced to live the lie not to trust their instincts that something is wrong with the picture. Secondly, it leads them to believe that behind closed doors everyone is having an easier go of it than they are. So kids love to see, hey, they yell too. Or they fight like we do, we aren’t freaks. All families have their issues, some bigger than others, but we all do.

In terms of our relationship it made us a unit in this project, and we will always be linked by it. We will always be the mother and

daughter that made that film about the kid going to work in the slums of India.

We made the film when Taylor was 15, and she is now almost 21. She is a very different person. She is a young women. She has grown up as kids do, and she has turned into a lovely person. That has much to do with her. The film taught me to step back and give her freedom, and in doing this she has come to me in a big way. We are very close. I respect her boundaries, and consequently she does not have that many. The other day she called me and said, "Mom, when I graduate from college I want us to make another film together." So, I guess she liked it after all!

3) You visited Zuccotti park during the ongoing Occupy Wall Street protests because you wanted to talk to the people themselves, get real-time interviews for the honest, direct perspective. People's responses that day went like this: "I just want a job and a house" and you wrote in your blog post, "...throw in a dog and a barbecue and that was the American Dream." Locally, a few years ago, someone was on the news because as a Halloween decoration stuck upon their lawn, was a faux gravestone that read "R.I.P Middle Class". In your blog post, you wrote of the people in Zuccotti park, "...they are living, walking, eating and breathing the values of the basic premise that this country was founded on. The fact that this makes them freaks in the eyes of many is a giant part of the problem. People have been living in tents for four weeks and it recently went down to thirty degrees at night." You suggest the book *Inequality Matters* about "the growing economic divide in America and its poisonous consequences". You also wrote "...people were really open, not begging or greedy. The New York police were totally cool. The signs read 'Tax Wall Street' and 'Mean People Suck'." If you were to offer ideas on how things could be improved, what would some of your suggestions be?

This problem so far exceeds my skill set I cannot begin to answer this properly. The system is broken, the world has changed. The globalization of the world has led us down so many paths. I believe the world is in the process of reinventing itself, something it does every couple of centuries. There are too many people. We have poor values. I think there are many people who want to work hard and can't find jobs, and there are many people who want to be America's next top anything.

The solutions will be long in coming. We are fighting cheaper labor in other countries and the fact we make next to nothing here. We live on our computers and that has taken so many jobs. Where will those jobs come from? If I had that answer I could run for President! I think we start with compassion. If everyone does even a little for others who have less, that is a place to start. But it gets back to the original answer I gave, which is that people don't want handouts, they want independence. They want to make their own choices be it regarding health care, their jobs, and where they live. Sadly, because of the way things are at the moment, many have been robbed of those choices. And that is where the anger and frustration come in. Anyone could get a mortgage, that didn't work out so well, and now almost nobody can get one.

It goes on and on. I failed math, I have no idea how it works out.

4) Similar to what you mention in your book, I, like your mother was at the forefront of experimenting and discovering the Czechoslovakian way to younger skin. I became a cosmetician, I bought books on Erno Laszlo's philosophies and I managed an entire cosmetics counter with thirty lines in a gorgeous store with marble floors and a huge marble winding staircase leading to my domain. Back then the questions from customers ranged from the typical 'what do you use?' to the more shocking, such as the time an older man grabbed the skin of his still attractive wife's neck and said, 'What can you do with this?!' I knew that I wouldn't be young forever and eventually I would need and want new dreams. Recently, while passing the time while getting the oil changed in my car, I picked up a small local tabloid and read an article about a former beauty queen, still quite caught up in the outer shell of who she once was. Though granted, most of us do look very different from the previous generations at our age, one needs to grow up emotionally and intellectually or risk becoming the archetype of Blanche Dubois from Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. What is it about the Baby Boomer generation that we all think like Dylan Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night ..."? Is it really fair that we have to look forever young in a youth-obsessed culture? How does a woman strike a balance between substance, aging gracefully and keeping herself looking and feeling youthful without compromising her personal truth in today's often superficial society? When we're *Between a Rock and a Hot Place*, that 'hot place' can be a hot career if we embrace the next phase.

This is an ongoing issue for women, and I think what it comes down to is what is right for you. I don't have that issue of "looking your age" or even "compromising personal truth". For some women that is looking young, dressing in jeans and little boots, getting a nip and a tuck, paying attention to their looks and holding on to a look that has been theirs for years. That may very well be their truth, and I don't think people should judge them any more than the reverse, when we judge those who let themselves go.

Aging gracefully...sometimes I grapple with what that means. I say, live gracefully and with personal dignity and look the way that makes you feel good about yourself.

We have all seen people who fall under the heading of "trying too hard" or have had bad work done and look worse than they might with wrinkles.

I think it's important to stay in shape and not for reasons of vanity but health.

Now when you do workout and keep a lean body, you look better in more youthful clothes than if you let your body fall apart.

Live vibrantly, be engaged, be active, give back, and if you feel great in tight jeans and a face-lift, if when you look in the mirror you like what you see, forget what the rest of the world says. I personally don't want anyone telling me how to look.

I got a note after being on the Kathie Lee and Hoda show. Someone said, "If you're advocating accepting fifty why do you wear your hair like a thirty year old?"

I like to. That is my response to them. Take care of yourself, be well groomed, get your checkups, watch what you eat, exercise and wear whatever the hell you want.

5) I loved this blog entry from *Tracey Talks*, "Do You Own Your Space?" You wrote, "I love this question as it can apply to so many things and often results in very lively interior and exterior debates. This question was posed to me last

summer by Brad Keywell, one of the owners and founders of Groupon, Inc. He was asking me in relation to my book and the whole aging boomer world. Did I own that space? The answer was instantly and definitively no. Truth is, in order for me to own it I would have to devote myself 24/7 and drop everything else and write strictly about aging and that is something I don't want to do. I have a form of intellectual ADD, I tend to exhaust a topic after a few years and then I am on to the next." I think in life we have many different things that we excel at from time to time but I think that you have a bigger space than most of us do. I feel, Tracey, that you own the very important space of taking the major issues to the people in a down-to-earth, humorous way that they can easily relate to. Your films, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, *The Guru*, *The Other End of the Line* are about people embracing their true selves and finding their voice by becoming morally responsible for the message they are here to give to the world. As you yourself have said on your blog, 'if you have a voice, do something good with it.' You have done that for us by having such a big space. What are some of the other issues or messages that you plan to convey in future works?

Oh, for that crystal ball. I tend to grasp whatever I feel is important to me in the moment. Or, if not the moment, certainly topics that live with me for a while. The films for the most part, outside of my documentary Lucky Ducks, were often things that I felt were in the zeitgeist or topics that were proposed to me that I in turn personalized. I am spoiled with my blog as I get to write about whatever turns me on that day. That is harder to pull off when big companies, contracts and all that goes with them, become involved. Suffice it to say, I will continue to explore what I feel is important as I move through the next phase of my life. I don't like revisiting old topics. There is a story in my birth family that I will write when the time is correct. I am playing with an idea now for my next book, but don't want to spill the beans just yet. So, I guess, stay tuned!

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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