

WRITTEN BY:  
**SANDRA RAMOS**

# **CLEAN SOCKS**



**FOR THE  
REVOLUTION**

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### ***Dedication***

*This book is dedicated to the only three children in the neighborhood who didn't want to live in the house on Cedar Ave, my three birth children. However, you blossomed beautifully - embodying ethics, radiating kindness, and navigating life's intricacies with grace and thoughtfulness. Your ability to think critically, make informed decisions, and rise above challenges is a testament to your resilience and strength.*

*With boundless love and admiration, this book is for you.*

## **Clean Socks for the Revolution**

### **Introduction**

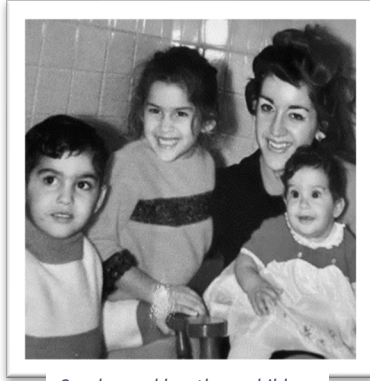
In the spectrum of societal change, some figures emerge from the shadows, often challenging the norms and reshaping the narratives of their times. One such luminary is Sandra Ramos, a woman whose life was a tapestry of rebellion, advocacy, and love. "The Symbolism of Clean Socks" is not just a biographical account; it is a poignant reflection on a woman's journey against the backdrop of a rapidly changing society. This tale is about Sandra - an unconventional mother, a crusader for justice, a challenge to societal norms, and a beacon for women's empowerment.

As readers explore Sandra Ramos' life through "Clean Socks for the Revolution," they are invited to observe and feel, question, and be inspired. Sandra's life is a powerful reminder that one individual, armed with conviction and courage, can create ripples of change. Through her story, one realizes that standing alone is not a sign of solitude but often a symbol of strength, especially when standing up for what is right.

Join us as we unfold the tale of a woman whose children's mismatched socks were a testament to a mother who was too busy with working, radical concepts, and action to pair them, whose purple house in Hackensack NJ became a beacon of hope, and whose indomitable spirit became a source of inspiration for many. Welcome to the remarkable story of Sandra Ramos and her crusade for justice.

## Chapter 1- The Symbolism of Socks

In a neighborhood where traditional homes had the usual decor, Sandra's purple-painted house stood out like a beacon of bohemian charm. When Sandra's children and their friends wanted to play, Sandra would convert the living room with a sea of mattresses that



*Sandra and her three children*

invited the children to do cartwheels and gymnastics. The only piece of furniture was a television, which was always off and stood idle amidst the amusing commotion.

The mismatched pile of socks in the Ramos household emerged as a powerful emblem of Sandra's defiance against the conventional. Where others saw neglect or oversight, Sandra's

choices revealed a conscious shift from more significant to the larger battles she fought every day. Sandra's children would make pocket change by pairing them up. While her children might not have always had neatly paired socks, they certainly had a mother dedicated to them and ethical causes.

Sandra's home drew the attention of the neighborhood children. It was a place where they could eat, play, sing, and be children. This utopian household was the envy of many, with children from all around wishing they could call it home. Decades later, this sentiment echoed through Sandra's 80th birthday celebration. Old friends from Hackensack, now adults in their 50's and 60's, fondly reminisced about the days when Sandra's home was their playground.

However, this independence went beyond the physical of playing and jumping around in the living room and included the values Sandra instilled in her children. Sandra's children didn't have strict curfews. She encouraged free thinking and promoted logic over authority.

Maria, Sandra's daughter, was a living example of Sandra's strategy. In a time when peer pressure frequently pushed children into adulthood, Maria made her own decisions. Her experience includes her choice to become sexually active in her 20s, which she chronicled in an article on page 191 of the book *Skin Deep*.

Sandra was not one to let injustice slide. Even when others perceived her as too consumed with her revolutionary endeavors, she had an uncanny ability to be there for her children when it mattered the most. One particularly telling instance was when her daughter, Maria, was punished unjustly at school. She was required to write one hundred times – "I will do what I am told when I am told to do it." To Sandra, this was not just an overzealous response to a child talking in class; it reflected a deeper problem. It symbolized an oppressive system that sought compliance without understanding, a system that prioritized rules over reason.

Sandra's reaction was swift and unyielding. Not only did she question the ridiculousness of the punishment, but she also challenged the school's rigid mindset. Maria did not complete her assignment; instead, Sandra wrote on the assignment paper, "What do you think this is - Nazi Germany in 1934? What if the teacher told her to go to the back of the room and remove her pants!" This was a bold move, but it showed that blind obedience can be dangerous. Many children have suffered silently being molested and abused following authoritative instructions without thinking.

The subsequent meeting with Mr. Padavano, the school superintendent, further demonstrated Sandra's irrepressible spirit. She was unapologetically herself, bringing along a boyfriend to the meeting who bore no familial relation to her children. He was allowed to attend the meeting, but they would not allow Maria, whose life was being discussed. Sandra

stated, "I will not agree to a meeting unless my daughter Maria is present." Therefore there was no meeting. In a defiant display of her disdain for unjust authority, Sandra started putting the wrapped cigar she had found on Mr. Padovano's desk in her mouth and placing her feet on his desk. Sandra's antics weren't simply for show; they posed a direct challenge to a system that looked more interested in upholding the status quo than in promoting the intellectual growth of children. Even though the meeting never happened, Maria was permitted to return to class until further notice. Through it all, the core of her protest was transparent: our children deserve better. They should be nurtured, understood, and taught to think critically, not mindlessly obey.

Years later, when Maria walked across the stage as a law school graduate, it was more than a personal achievement. Maria had learned to work hard, persevere, believe in the power of advocacy, and challenge the status quo.

Years fly by, and one evening, at a dull United Way dinner, surprisingly, Mr. Padavano approached her—the same Mr. Padavano who was the school superintendent during Maria's writing incident. The last time they'd met, Sandra was perched on his desk, challenging the system and its illogical rules. Now, he greeted her with a hint of nostalgia and mischief in his eyes. "Mrs. Ramos," he remarked, "how good to see you. We haven't had so much fun since your children left school." The comment was laced with irony and acknowledgment. Despite prior conflicts, there appeared to be respect between them—or, at the very least, a sense of humor—as they recalled when Sandra had shaken the foundations of the school's governing board.

When Sandra's young son Bobby's foot was injured by a wagon during playtime on a gravel pathway at the Head Start preschool, Sandra recognized this wasn't an isolated accident

but a recurring hazard. Sandra found out that there have been other incidences of children being hurt while playing on the gravel. The teacher told Sandra that a church rule barred the children from playing on the grass, forcing them to the unsafe gravel terrain. The teachers said there was nothing she could do about it. After taking her son Bobby to the hospital, she approached Mr. Riley, the school principal. While others may have contacted him with polite concerns or humble requests, Sandra was undeniably forthright. She delivered a poignant ultimatum, illustrating a potential protest outside his office with 50 mothers, 49 of whom she exaggerated wielding signs protesting the endangerment of their children. Their chosen slogan? "Pretty Lawns or Broken Limbs."

With a 3:00 p.m. deadline looming, Mr. Riley was concerned. Upon Sandra's callback, it was evident in his voice that her advocacy had made an impact. While he tried to underplay her influence, Sandra was aware of the power of her actions. Her actions allowed the children to play on the grass, demonstrating the power of tenacious parental advocacy.

When Sandra's youngest daughter, whom she called little Sandy, began dating a boy named Eric, the school took issue with the young man waiting for her outside her classroom until the bell signaled the start of class. Sandra's daughter received a letter from the school stating that Eric could not stay with her outside the classroom. Knowing her rights and those of her child, Sandra immediately stepped in. She confronted the school's administration, asserting that until the bell rang, it was her daughter's personal time. She argued that her daughter had every right to spend it as she saw fit, including spending it with her boyfriend, who was also a student at the school.



Considering Sandra's reputation and her firm stance on the matter, the school decided to concede. This served yet another example of Sandra's unshakable commitment to her children and her capacity to speak up against laws she believed to be unjust.

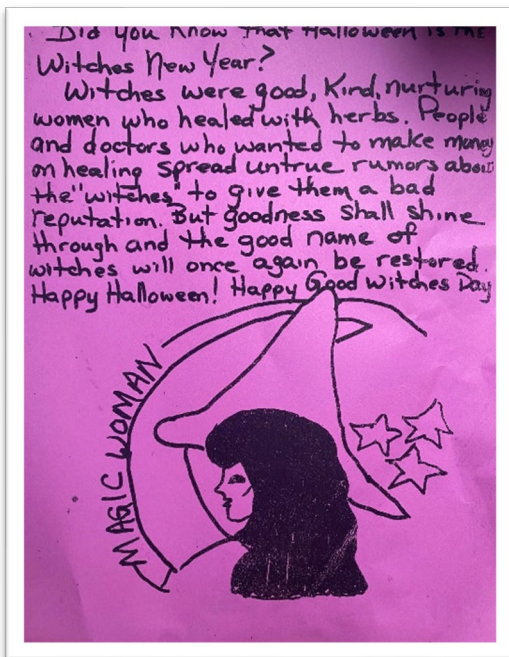
Sandra tirelessly challenged gender biases in various facets of her children's lives. She successfully protested a boys-only Little League policy after her daughter Maria wanted to join. Permission was given for girls to join, but without uniforms. Sandra protested, and uniforms were given.

When her son Bobby was denied entry to cooking classes deemed "for girls," Sandra's intervention ensured he could attend, breaking another stereotype. Furthermore, she corrected a teacher, Mr. Lawrence who presented a male-centric view of early human agriculture and did not mention women's role in his teaching. She informed him that men were the hunters, and the women did the planting and gathering.

In a time when every lecture, task, and conversation had as its underlying theme, men achieved everything. Sandra felt uncomfortable with this, especially knowing that history was sometimes biased. She quickly provided an alternative viewpoint when her children's homework featured Columbus "discovering" America, highlighting that indigenous populations already occupied the region. It wasn't just about rewriting history in her eyes but about giving her children the tools to question and think critically, not simply accept what's handed to them.

In 1972, a children's album, "Free to Be... You and Me" by Marlo Thomas — featured stories and songs celebrating tolerance, individuality, and gender neutrality. It took on sexual stereotypes in the most wholesome and positive way, teaching children that it was okay for

boys to want dolls and for girls to aspire to be whatever they wished. It was a message that Sandra believed every child needed to hear. But when she approached the school library to purchase it, they declined. Undeterred, Sandra took her request to the PTA meeting. Standing confidently, she pitched her case to the parents and teachers present. Yet, the reactions were mixed. While many secretly applauded her initiative, they kept their distance, afraid of being associated with such a "radical" idea. Sandra, however, was not one to back down from a challenge. Realizing the importance of the tape's message, she took it upon herself to purchase and donate it to the library. It was her way of ensuring that future generations would get a taste of a more equal and fair perspective.



Sandra had a custom every year on Halloween that made her children hide. She would hand out flyers to the children in addition to treats. Happy Halloween! was written on bright purple paper with large letters. "Celebrate the Witch's New Year!" Sandra didn't simply associate Halloween with pumpkins and trick-or-treating. It was a chance to dispel myths and educate people. Her flyer would tell the story of the ancient wise women, sometimes called witches, who

had a profound understanding of herbs, healing, and nature's mysteries. In their later education, Sandra's children made their "Celebrate the Witch's New Year" flyers and handed them out.

In the tapestry of life, while some threads may appear frayed or mismatched like those scattered socks, Sandra's story is one of unyielding love and advocacy. Through her battles against injustice and unconventional parenting, she wove a legacy of empowerment, free thinking, and unwavering love.

## **Chapter 2 - The Birth of a Crusader**

A series of remarkable journeys marked Sandra's life, each shaping the woman she would become. One of the most pivotal journeys occurred when she dared escape from what she felt was a troubled home life in her early teens. As a child, Sandra lived in a strict household with structured routines. While the parents were proud, they often bickered. Sandra sought more freedom and exploration.

Sandra felt upset after attending a Rock and Roll Show on Christmas Eve with a boyfriend who later chose to spend New Year's Eve with friends. However, a close friend, Blanca, who resembled Sandra, and many thought they were sisters because of their curly hair, and they both wore pink, invited her to a New Year's Eve gathering at her family's home. Sandra's mother insisted on an early curfew, causing conflict. Days later, her mother disapproved of a Virgin Mary necklace Sandra wore, forcibly removing it from her neck at school. This incident compelled Sandra to consider running away.

It was a chilly morning when Sandra and her friend Madeline went to the port authority in NYC; they inquired about places they could visit for less than \$10. They were asked if they preferred round-trip or one-way tickets. One way was their response. The tickets would cost \$7.67 to go to Baltimore. The two determined and resilient young girls boarded a bus to Baltimore with nothing but a small bag of belongings, a few dollars, and a dream of a better life.

Sandra had decided she could no longer endure the strict rules at home and was willing to face the unknown to find her path.

Sandra and Madeline were a constant pair. They were oddly complementary to one another because of their shared rebelliousness— Sandra had bleached blonde hair and penciled-in eyebrows, walked with a wiggle, and idolized Marilyn Monroe. At the same time, Madeline had dark eyes, thick makeup, and black wavy hair and was a rebel. Sandra and Madeline appeared much older than they were.

Upon their arrival in Baltimore, they got a job at the White Coffee Pot, working the overnight shift. In the morning, they took their tips and rented a room at the Roxy Hotel. The hotel was a dump with giant roaches, which Sandra had never seen before, until she took a bath and washed them down the drain.

Sandra was reassigned to another White Coffee Pot across town, where she took a trolley car because the management didn't want two friends working together because of the potential for theft. Despite being young, she had a remarkable work ethic.

They didn't have any money for food, so they would ask the night chef to make them breakfast, consisting of fried eggs, grilled cheese, and home fries for dinner. Additionally, they would request meals from the morning chef. "Didn't you eat last night?" the cook said. If they said "no," he would also prepare home fries, grilled cheese, and fried eggs for breakfast. Since that day, Sandra has fond memories of home fries, grilled cheese, and fried eggs.

Maddie and Sandra enjoyed roaming around Baltimore and looking at the odd houses so different from the ones back home. They bought papers daily and looked for some word of

disappearance, but none was forthcoming. They later learned that their parents had been frantic.

Undoubtedly, there were difficulties on the road to freedom. Sandra and Madeline decided to work with Lee Cherry to get some nude photos done of them. He asserted that the failure of the photo shoots made it impossible for him to compensate them. A 13-state alarm suddenly became a 23-state alert when the two exploited young girls were unable to notify the police due to authorities looking for them.

They received hamburgers and milkshakes from him before being dismissed. Sandra is positive the goddess was watching out for them, considering the possibility that they were easily susceptible to being trafficked as sex slaves.

A couple of days later, Sandra and Madeline met someone who offered them money to have sex with them. As they interacted with these men, an unsettling realization dawned upon them: one of them bore an eerie resemblance to Madeline's abusive stepfather. This distressing likeness triggered painful memories for Madeline, pushing her to the brink of reliving her traumatic experiences. To spare Madeline more suffering, Sandra consented to have sex with the man who resembled Madeline's stepfather. The situation inside that hotel room became more and more dangerous. Finally, the hotel management delivered Sandra and Madeline from the exploitative circumstances, saying, "Get "out of here! The police are on their way"!

Madeline wanted to return home to see her boyfriend. The two young women, who had little money, took a bus to New York City and found Romeos, a restaurant on 42nd Street that offered spaghetti and meatballs for ninety-nine cents.

They were finally apprehended in Brooklyn, and Sandra was taken to a youth home for girls. Her actions were deemed by the court to be indicators of emotional instability and a propensity for delinquency, and she was consequently committed to the Hawthorne Cedar Knowles School for Emotionally Disturbed Children, which the Jewish Board Guardians ran.

Most of the students at the school would smash windows, hurting themselves out of pure rage or despair. Others would try to flee by rushing down the road through the farm that led to a city bus. But she wasn't like the others. She didn't resort to violence or escape attempts. Instead, she retreated into herself. She was almost catatonic, consumed by a whirlwind of emotions. The only solace she found was in an unexpected place - the teachings of Catholicism, introduced to her by Doris May (also known as poo poo), Sandra's Goddess Mother. Doris was also the biological mother of Sherry May, Sandra's friend, and the sole practicing Catholic at the reform school. Sandra was instructed to contact the school's Rabbi for guidance and support with her complex feelings. Sandra met with the Rabbi, but she could not connect with him.

Years later, Maria, one of her daughters, received recognition from the National Council of Jewish Women. In her award speech, Maria said that instilling Jewish values in children early on is essential if you want them to grow up to be authentic Jews. Maria upheld these customs for her children, although Sandra did not.

Sandra found solace in the little corners of the establishment where skills were taught by Ms. Anderson, who introduced her to the art of cooking. On the other hand, Aunt Dotty was the guiding force behind the whirring sewing machines. The idea was to prepare her for the practical world that wouldn't necessarily require a higher academic acumen.

But the administration was soon faced with a quandary. They couldn't pigeonhole her into the same category as the other students. Recognizing her potential and perhaps, to some extent, feeling at a loss about her placement, they permitted her to attend classes off-ground at a nearby school, Pleasantville High School. She discovered more in Pleasantville than just a change of scenery. She found a platform for her ideas to be heard, which led to completing a term paper using Dimitroff's works on how prisons affect society. The responses were overwhelmingly favorable.

However, there was a hurdle to cross. To graduate from Pleasantville, she needed to pass the math regions. Mathematics was never her strong suit. But, armed with a Stanley Kaplan book, she embarked on a mission. Instead of trying to understand the intricate details of the subject, she memorized it. And it worked. She scored a C+ on the exam, enough for her to graduate.

After Sandra graduated, she decided she wanted to be a dietitian, so she went off the grounds and got a job as a waitress at Hannah's Coffee Shop. The older, more seasoned waitress worked the counters, but the customers seemed to gravitate to Sandra. As a result, the other waitress left, and Sandra took over the tables and counters single-handedly, earning \$75 a week—a substantial sum at that time.

At Hannah's Coffee Shop, she met Mario, a 32-year-old bartender who worked at an upscale venue nearby. He was from Yugoslavia and was formally known as "Glaucasluga." It was required that he would meet with Sandra's social worker, Ms. Slain. Despite receiving the NYC Mayor's Social Worker of the Year Award at the time, Sandra believed Ms. Slain had too much book knowledge and not enough warmth and understanding. Sandra would only read movie

magazines in Ms. Slains' office and never conversed with her. When Ms. Slain inquired about Sandra's weekend plans, Sandra would reply, "It's none of your business." Sandra said I might be willing to relate to you if I know more about you. "I am not the sick one; you are dear," Ms. Slain retorted. Apparently, Ms. Slain had not yet acquainted herself with the works of R.D. Laing, a controversial and revolutionary psychiatrist from the 20th century. His most iconic statement, "there are no sick or no well," encapsulated his belief that these classifications were merely social constructs. Instead, he theorized that what society labeled as mental illness could sometimes be a rational response to the irrationalities and stresses of the world, especially the intricacies of interpersonal relationships.

Sandra saved her money and used it for a summer European tour with the University of San Francisco. The head of the tour approached Sandra one evening. He told her that each summer, he singled out a young woman from the tour, based on her charm and attractiveness, to be his secret "mistress." This year, Sandra, with her vibrant personality and allure, was his choice. He added that his wife would join him at the end of the tour, after which they planned to head to Palma de Mallorca."

During the trip, Sandra encountered a woman whose demeanor intrigued her. At home, societal expectations dictated that they maintain a facade of utmost respectability. Yet, as Sandra had observed with many women on these vacation tours, away from the prying eyes of their familiar world, they yearned for a liberation of spirit. They sought places where they could shed their daily personas, even if briefly, to embrace a wilder side where anonymity granted them freedom.



Although she was scheduled to leave the following day, this woman had a taste for adventure and was keen to visit London's Soho. The two decided to venture to Soho that evening. They settled in a lively restaurant that attracted a mix of locals and tourists. Sandra's new friend had an odd but amusing habit; she would ask the host if two men entered the restaurant to invite them to join their table, offering extra seats beside them.

As the evening wore on, a striking man walked in. He had a distinct aura, accentuated by a scarf casually draped around his neck and a stylish hat that shielded part of his face. He carried a bottle of wine, suggesting he was accustomed to the finer things in life. The host called and offered the striking man a seat at the table with Sandra and her friend. The man replied, "Only if the girls don't know who I am." He sat at the table, the two women intrigued by his strange demeanor and unknowing of his identity.

As the night deepened, her newly found friend vanished. Curious, she turned to the mysterious guest, whom she would ask, "Where did she go?" the man responded, "Oh, you are so naive." Her friend had left with the waiter that she was flirting with all night and was telling everyone about how much he looked like the famous Louie Jordan.

Sandra left the restaurant in the company of the mysterious man; he extended an invitation to his apartment. Sandra said yes, but only if he promised he wouldn't get fresh with her. He chuckled and said, "I am not desperate for a woman; I have been with Sofia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida."

When she first walked inside his apartment, she saw a picture of him wearing a Nazi Sea captain's hat. She immediately thought, "Oh my gosh, if you're a Nazi, kill me immediately

because I'm Jewish!" He responded, laughing, "I'm Carl Mohner, and Gina Lollobrigida and Sofia Loren were my co-stars in The Sinking of the Bismarck.

Sandra spent the night in his company. In the morning, he was picked up by his studio driver, and Sandra was dropped off at her hotel. Dr. S questioned Sandra, "Where were you?" as she returned to her hotel. She told him that she had spent the night with a famous person. Dr. S became furious. Since his wife was waiting for him at the end of the tour, Sandra thought he had a lot of nerve.

Ironically, shortly after this encounter, Sandra discovered a book from the movie The "Sinking of the Bismarck" at a railway station, starring Gina Lollobrigida, Carl Mohner, and Sofia Loran.

### **Chapter 3 - Marriage and Children**

Sandra was a woman of paradoxes, synthesizing various influences and experiences that created her unique outlook on life and her mission. Born into a Jewish family in Brooklyn, she found love and married a Cuban man named Magin. While at the Colonial Restaurant, Sandra encountered Magin, a Cuban man who immediately took a liking to her. The circumstances of their meeting were far from conventional. Magin was already romantically involved with a server from the same restaurant. Yet, he felt a connection with Sandra and boldly asked her out. This encounter showcased Sandra's wit and self-assured nature. Her playful rebuttal about having "too many boyfriends" indicated a woman comfortable in her skin, not easily swayed by flattery.

At this time, 17-year-old Sandra, while in a relationship with George, a 34-year-old police officer, portrayed herself as a 21-year-old. They would frequent the local together.

Sandra was driving her green Pontiac while traveling down Hackensack Avenue in Hackensack NJ. A Sam Braen truck struck her in the back, pushing her five feet into River Edge, where George was a police officer. The incident unveiled Sandra's actual age to George. George broke up with Sandra in anger. She also lost her job as a waitress at the Madison Bar and Grill because she was not 21.

After her return from Europe, Sandra was walking down Main Street in Hackensack with her mother, Faye. She bumped into one of the servers at the restaurant, who asked her if she was returning to work. Sandra said she didn't think so. Remember Papa Chrisy's eggplant rollatini? The waitress enticed her. She was tempted by this and ended up returning to the restaurant. Soon after, she encountered Magin, the daily menu delivery man, who once again seized the opportunity to ask her out. The waitresses warned her that she only had one date with Magin. If you went to bed with him, he got what he wanted and, that was it. If you didn't then he wasn't interested anymore. With George out of the picture, Sandra felt inclined to accept Magin's invitation this time, as she always liked a challenge.



*Meadowbrook Dinner Theatre*

Magin also worked as a waiter at the Meadow Brook Dinner Theater in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, and secured a waitress job there for Sandra.

In 1959 it reopened as one of the country's first dinner theatres, where the audience could

have an evening of entertainment that would include dinner, dancing, and a show. Broadway performers like Van Johnson, Orson Bean, Dorothy Lamour, Eve Arden and Ann Sothern appeared in shows like *Gypsy*, *The Odd Couple*, *Guys and Dolls* and *Company*.

It was a profitable position due to the large tips based on dinner and play costs. Sandra faced challenges like a dress code for waitresses. There was racial discrimination, as only white individuals worked as waitstaff while people of color were restricted to kitchen roles. Despite suggesting a capable dishwasher for a waiter's position, the management refused based on racial biases. The dinner theater also served African lobster tail during the South African apartheid boycott, which Sandra protested.

The theater frequently held bus tours during the week, mostly from churches and women's organizations. These visitors observed the show but typically did not stick around to dance. Except for a few "Twinkle Toe" dancers who would leave after the music stopped at around 2am, the venue was nearly deserted when the show ended at 10:30 p.m. Sandra the shop steward suggested that everyone chip in \$5 so that the bus boys could clean up the tables after the last dancers had left. The wait crew could depart several hours early as a result. The manager, nevertheless, disapproved of this notion. Sandra warned that there would be a

protest outside the venue and told the Cedar Grove Police that they would need to handle the crowd since there would be about 50 protesters—again, Sandra exaggerated 49 of them. The manager was warned by the police before giving in to the demands.

There was a fancy, expensive party going on one evening. A man allegedly struck his wife during the incident. When the wife went upstairs, she saw a large man, the bathroom attendant who was standing outside the men's room and asked for help. She expressed that fear in driving home with her violent and intoxicated husband. Sandra was contacted by the attendant for assistance. Out of concern for the woman's safety, Sandra went up to the manager and advised him to call a cab for her. Sandra's complaints were rejected by the manager, who told her to return to her station and that it wasn't her concern. Sandra expressed her outrage and the need for action. She has a serious way with words. "We must do something she said! He could hurt someone or even hurt someone in your family".

In response to her insistence, the manager fired Sandra. Tragically, years later, Sandra found out from a colleague that the manager's son had been paralyzed after being struck by a drunk driver.

After being fired from the Meadowbrook for expressing concerns about the intoxicated guest, Sandra, alongside some of her college friends from a summer program, decided to go to the Meadowbrook Dinner Theatre and protest on the opening night of the play "Fiddler on the Roof". They held up signs with phrases like "Fiddler on the Roof, Waitress in the Poor House" and "A Good Waitress is Like a Good Nazi, Does Not Think or Ask Questions." There was a lot of press coverage, but Sandra never got her job back. The union was not supportive.



*Sandra and Magin*

Magin, known affectionately as Desi Arnaz, the Cuban Jew, carried the reputation of an astute businessman. His charm and ability to easily maneuver through social circles had won him many friends and, perhaps, a few envious glances. Sandra and Magin enjoyed a six-month romantic relationship before choosing to marry. However, during their engagement, Magin's romantic behavior waned. Sandra believes this change in behavior is tied to the "Madonna Whore Theory". She speculates that Magin started viewing her more as a "Madonna"—an adored and revered figure, especially as the future mother of his children, rather than someone he could maintain a passionate romance with.

Sandra picked a Catholic church for her wedding. Magin didn't adhere to any one religion. Their wedding venue, Saint Cecilia's, was steeped in tradition. But Sandra's heart ached, knowing her parents wouldn't attend the church ceremony. Although her mother, a devout communist, wasn't religious, she enjoyed their Jewish heritage. It may have influenced her parents' decision to skip the religious service.

However, the real drama unfolded with her grandfather, Robert, fondly known to many as Robert Breck. He had controversially changed his last name during the rise of the Nazis, opting for a less conspicuous identity than his birth name Blumberg. Sandra's father never really forgave him for that, believing he should have held onto their Jewish surname. Yet, amidst all the family rifts, this very grandfather held Sandra's hand, leading her down the aisle of Saint Cecilia's.

To incorporate Jewish tradition, Sandra's mother tried to convince Sandra to add a chuppah—a canopy beneath which a Jewish couple stands during their wedding—to the ceremony. However, Sandra was adamant about having a strictly Catholic tradition.

Back at home, Magin's influence grew. The businesspeople and county committee members, predominantly men at the time, recognized the power of the Spanish vote. They courted Magin, gave him nicknames, and flattered him because of his charming demeanor and because they knew he could deliver the Spanish vote. With Magin on their side, they were winning an ally and an entire community.

Sandra grappled with the new realities of marriage – sharing space, intertwining lives, and the little reminders of Magin's presence, like his belongings casually lying in her drawers. Sandra wanted a marriage with passion, romance, and excitement, but they had different outlooks. Sandra wanted to change the world, and Magin wanted a house with a circular driveway.

As time passed, some of their relationship's passion faded. They were fortunate to have three lovely children, who each mirrored the diversity and best characteristic of each parent. But, raising children in a shifting society while juggling their changing identities presented challenges. Sandra chose to file for divorce in 1970. Despite the pleasant nature of her husband, there were fundamental differences in what both wanted from life.

After her divorce, Sandra made a bold move in the context of her neighborhood. She rented out the upstairs portion of her two-family house to the Royals, the first black family to reside in her neighborhood. In her selection, she was strategic. Sandra chose a family that was bourgeois and respectable to preempt any typical biases or prejudices. She wanted to put her

neighbors in a position where, if they had any objections, they'd have to confront the core of their prejudice head-on.

Some individuals in the community were prejudiced against the people Sandra was renting to. Due to the presence of black residents, certain parents prohibited their children from playing with Sandra's children. In one notable instance, Sandra's daughter's best friend was forbidden from visiting because "there were niggers living in their house". Sandra, fueled by indignation, confronted the father, and questioned if he still received communion every Sunday. He replied, "of course why do you ask"? Sandra highlighted the hypocrisy of his actions, challenging him to reconcile his purported religious values with his prejudices.

The Royals seemed a perfect fit. However, challenges arose. The husband, a TV Producer who frequently traveled, began to express concerns about his wife's safety due to frequent visits from the Black Panthers.

Once a week, Black Panthers members would deliver 100 newspapers to Sandra's home. Sandra would dedicate herself to selling these publications, raising \$25 weekly for the Panthers' fight. She even entered establishments in black neighborhoods, like the popular bar Leon's in Hackensack, NJ. Because she was a white woman, she usually drew questions and looks. Customers would be perplexed and wonder why a "white chick" would sell a publication that actively supported black people's rights. She would reply, "I'm selling them because you guys won't get off your behind!"

To reduce her housing costs and shared childcare, Sandra searched for a single mother with whom she might share a home. She used her connections in the PTA and the Unitarian church she attended to spread the word. She observed that no callers who responded to her



inquiry had happy marriages. In all fairness to the happily married people, if there were any, none came to her house. Instead, a pattern became apparent: every woman who responded to her post had been the victim of violence at some point.

The first woman who showed up at her front door was Helga. Helga's wounded face stood out in the dim streetlight glow. As she walked into the house, Sandra made her sleeping arrangements. The home wasn't luxurious, but it was cozy and secure. Sandra's eyes began to well up with tears as she listened to Helga's tales of her work with the Farm Workers and the heinous abuse she endured at the hands of her husband. The husband was insecure and jealous because he was afraid Helga would go to bed with the farm workers, most of whom were Hispanic. But there was no place for pity, only resolve and action, thanks to the resilient attitude and the supportive environment.

Word of mouth, one of the most potent tools in any community, did its magic. Before Sandra knew it, her home had transformed into a sanctuary for women and children escaping abusive situations. However, such a sanctuary doesn't remain a secret for long, especially when the numbers grow. The local police got wind of Sandra's makeshift refuge. At first, there was skepticism and suspicion. "23 people?" they would exclaim, not believing the count. But each visit would confirm the stories. They saw a house filled beyond capacity, not with despair but hope. Sandra had to tread a delicate line. She worked hard to ensure the safety and privacy of the women and children she sheltered while maintaining open communication with township officials. The last thing she wanted was for the sanctuary to be shut down due to any legal complications.

## Chapter 4 - Radicalism and Protesting/Identity and Activism



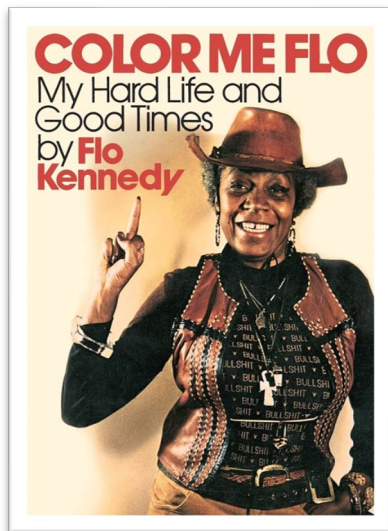
**Feminism** was rising, and the traditional family structure was being questioned. Ever the rebel, Sandra felt the urge to pursue her path that aligned more closely with her growing feminist beliefs. Her eclectic journey led her to become a radical feminist, yet she held steadfastly her views on abortion and bottle-feeding.

Her faith and personal experiences had molded her beliefs, seeing abortion not so much as a political or feminist issue but a deeply moral and ethical one. While she believed in a woman's right to make decisions about her body, she felt that every life, even the unborn, had an intrinsic value. This stance often put her at odds with some of her peers, leading to heated debates.

On bottle feeding, Sandra also had strong feelings. Sandra tended to support the traditional method in an era when formula feeding was becoming a more and more common, modern replacement for breastfeeding. She believed in the correlation between nature and nursing's benefits for health. Sandra was also involved in the Nestle boycott, which produced the Carnation formula. She also keenly understood the challenges and demands many women faced, and she never passed judgment on those forced to bottle-feed.

Sandra reflects on the teatime demonstration she attended against Lady Bird Johnson's "Mother of the Year" award. Sandra was eight and a half months pregnant, wearing a bright orange dress and a flowered hat, openly opposing the Vietnam War. She attracted the attention of radical feminist Florence R. Kennedy. The phrase "Hey hey, LBJ, how many kids did

you kill today?" perfectly encapsulated the feelings of the period. Her meeting with Flo was set amidst her excitement about meeting interesting and exciting people. However, she found that one day, while visiting her apartment, Flo and her guests were engrossed in a game of Scrabble rather than the wild party Sandra anticipated. Flo's home was steeped in history, having once been Billie Holiday's suite.



Flo was bold, forthright, and unapologetically herself. The cover of Flo Kennedy's "Color Me Flo" directly reflected her audacious spirit. She wasn't one to shrink back or cater to societal expectations. The image of her giving the world the middle finger with a band around her hat that read "Dyke" was a visual distillation of her defiance and refusal to adhere to the conventions of that time. When people questioned her, "are you a lesbian?" she would reply, "are you, my alternative?" It sent a message of resistance and empowerment, a loud and clear declaration of her intent to be herself, regardless of how the world perceived her. **Flo Kennedy** had a significant impact on Sandra's life. Her wisdom, humor, and frankness come through in Sandra's account. She was an influencer in the most authentic sense of the word, even before such a term became mainstream. She hosted numerous personalities in her home and facilitated many meaningful connections and conversations. Sandra's evolving relationship with Flo Kennedy was pivotal in many ways. It opened doors to a world of activism for passionate individuals fighting for change. Through Flo, Sandra was introduced to numerous influential figures in the feminist movement of the time. This widened Sandra's horizons and enriched her understanding of the

depth and breadth of feminist ideals. The women's liberation movement was in full swing, and the women's coffeehouses were its unsung “sheros”.

One such introduction was to Peggy Brennan, a woman who symbolized the internal conflict many women faced during that period. Living an affluent life married to a top executive, she appeared to have it all. While visiting her husband, a prominent executive in the Seagram’s building, she saw Flo protesting outside. Peggy told her husband, “I belong more with them than you,” and left to join the protest. Her decision to choose activism over luxury, symbolized by selling her wedding ring, deeply resonated with Sandra. This act highlighted Peggy's transformation and the profound bond and support women of the movement shared.

Sandra's experiences were broadened further when she, Peggy, and Flo spent time on Fire Island, an iconic location that often buzzed with thinkers, artists, and activists. Here, Sandra's network expanded exponentially. Figures like Sandra Hoffman and other notable feminists became part of her circle, amplifying her impact and understanding of the movement.

Sandra convinced the upstairs neighbor to drive her to Atlantic City. After arriving much like her previous draft board protest, she had one child in a carriage and one child on each arm. A New York Times reporter approached and interviewed her. The reporter was particularly intrigued upon learning that Sandra was the wife of a Republican County committee man, finding it an interesting and unique twist to the story.

Once in Atlantic City, they distributed flyers about women's oppression to women on the boardwalk. During the distribution, one man took a flyer, only to tear it up in front of them. In response, they commented to the woman who was with this man. “I would sleep with him if I, were you?”.

The protest in Atlantic City was centered around the “freedom trash can” where they disposed of items representing oppressive beauty standards was a poignant critique of societal expectations. While the media might have sensationalized the act of burning bras, it was so much more than that. It was a stand against all forms of gender-based expectations and prejudices.

That evening one of Sandra’s most vivid memories was their protest at the Miss America pageant. Some of the women put on fancy hats and snuck into the convention hall. They unfurled a banner and were quickly thrown out of the hall by security. Sneaking into the Miss America Convention Hall was not just an act of defiance but a powerful statement. It symbolized the women’s unwillingness to be silenced.

Flo's guidance and the support of other like-minded women solidified Sandra's journey from a curious observer to a passionate activist. The world of activism she had been introduced to forever changed her perspective, shaping her into a force to be reckoned with in the fight for equality.

Sandra's actions and beliefs consistently placed her at the forefront of societal change. Whether championing women's rights by distributing leaflets on the boardwalk, a gesture with varied responses reflective of a divided society, or supporting Shirley Chisholm's groundbreaking campaign in Florida, Sandra was unyielding in her commitment to feminism. Chisholm's bid as the first black woman for the Democratic nomination was not just a political milestone; it symbolized the changing landscape of American society, and Sandra stood firmly with her.

Furthermore, her time at the Hackensack, New Jersey, draft board demonstrated a different facet of her activism. This is where Sandra met Quaker Dorothy Mock, a protestor at the draft board. Dorothy was impressed by Sandra's dedication to showing up every morning at 6 a.m. to protest the Vietnam War. Sandra would bring her children along, one in a stroller and the other in each hand. Dorothy became a guiding light in her activist endeavors and introduced her to "The Prophet" by Kahlil Gibran, which still guides Sandra today.

As she delved deeper into the feminist world, Sandra encountered diverse communities and spaces. The women's coffee house was one such place. Peggy's involvement was an entry point, but Sandra's unique flair made her stand out. Her weekly routine of stopping by D'audios bakery became an anticipated event. The cheesecake was not just a treat but an icebreaker, a conversation starter. Amidst the sweetness and baked goodness, Sandra started acknowledging her attraction to women, particularly the tall redhead who worked at the bakery.

However, as she became more involved with the community at the coffee house, Sandra faced new challenges. While coming to terms with her sexual orientation, she confronted another set of expectations. The community's perception of how a lesbian should look was at odds with Sandra's personal style and self-expression. She wasn't one to conform to norms, not in activism, not in her choices, and not in fashion.

Dressed in silk and colors that reflected her vibrant personality, Sandra was judged not for who she was but for how she presented herself. The pressure to conform to the stereotypical image of wearing flannel shirts and jeans was palpable. Yet, Sandra's essence lay in her fierce individuality. Just as she had resisted societal expectations, she chose to wear what

made her feel authentic, breaking another stereotype in her journey of self-discovery and advocacy.

The coffee house, a haven for many, symbolized women's empowerment and autonomy in a world that often seemed indifferent to their struggles. However, even in such a space, there were differing views on how women should act and what they should represent.

Sandra's friend Yvonne had asked Sandra if her boyfriend could stay at her house until he got a job. He was native American and would drive into NY with Sandra and take the subway to the Native American Center. One of the groups at the coffee house who saw Sandra with her male friend said, "What does he have, a golden dick?" indicated their displeasure with Sandra's decision because she was in the company of a male friend. The group name Fort Dyke's principles seemed unyielding, pushing for a strict separation from anything associated with patriarchal influences.

The incident at Bedford Hills, however, changed everything. A marshal who was supposed to be maintaining order at a protest in favor of the female prisoners instead struck a female protestor. This act of violence became a significant point of contention, further highlighting the underlying issues and mistreatment the activists were rallying against. After the incident, Sandra's immediate and bold confrontation with the marshal solidified her reputation as a staunch defender of women's rights and justice. The sight of Sandra confronting an authority figure for his maltreatment of a woman showcased her unwavering commitment to the cause. Her immediate, visceral reaction was a stark departure from the passivity that women were often expected to exhibit. This act of courage and defiance, coming to the defense

of another woman, altered the dynamics. For a while, the women who had distanced themselves from her at the coffee house now viewed her as a “shero”.

## Chapter 5 - Mikell's Melodies



Long before Sandra became a shelter founder and a feminist icon, she was a waitress at Mikell's, a renowned jazz club in the heart of New York City. It was known for its interracial clientele and the owners Pat and Mike Mikell were an inter-racial couple.

Its red brick facade and vintage marquee were a testament to an era celebrating live music and intimate gatherings. Established in the 1960s, Mikell's quickly became a significant player in the city's thriving music scene, drawing a diverse crowd from all corners and beyond.

Mikell's was more than just a jazz club; it was a cultural interracial hub that attracted legendary musicians and prominent figures from all walks of life. As a waitress, Sandra navigated a world where celebrities mingled every day. Yet, what set her apart was her genuine humility and her steadfast focus on her mission to support her family and make a difference. While Mikell's patrons swayed to the rhythm, few knew of the revolution Sandra quietly orchestrated at home. By night, she was the friendly waitress at a jazz club, but by day, she was a beacon of hope for many battered women and children. Sandra worked until 3am, but ensured her children and some of their friends from the neighborhood got to school on time every day, even if it meant using toothpicks to keep her eyes open after running on just a few hours of sleep.



Her down-to-earth demeanor endeared Sandra to the famous patrons of Mikell's. While she served the likes of jazz legends and prominent figures, she treated everyone with the same respect and warmth, regardless of their status. When renowned customers would tell Mikell's owner that Sandra behaves like she doesn't know who we are, she would respond that she doesn't. Sandra didn't get star-struck by celebrities; instead, she focused on genuinely interacting with people.

Sandra's approach to celebrities was symbolic of her larger philosophy in life. She didn't pay much attention to fame or fortune. Her heart and mind were fixed on the revolution she believed in – a revolution of women's rights, equality, and justice. This laser focus on her mission gave her the strength to weather the challenges of supporting her family while running a shelter out of her home.

In many ways, Sandra's time at Mikell's was a microcosm of her life's journey. She moved through diverse spaces, engaging with people from all walks of life, but never lost sight of her purpose. Sometimes her daughter Sandy would visit the club laying on the bench, sucking her thumb and holding her pillow, which she called “the gungaha.” She later grew up to be a jazz singer and a music therapist.

"Clean Socks for the Revolution" captures not only the creation of the shelter but also the mosaic of experiences and influences that shaped Sandra. Her time as a waitress at Mikell's was a chapter in her life story highlighting her unique ability to connect with people. Sandra's legacy reminds us that while the world may be filled with fame and glamour, the determined efforts of individuals like her truly make a lasting impact.

## Chapter 6 - The Wild Bunch

In 1970, while separated from her husband, Sandra would spend some weekends with her best friend Maddie and her daughter Michelle. Maddie was a black woman who identified as "colored." Maddie's son had a child with a white woman, and Maddie raised the baby as her own.

On one weekend, they visited Arrow Park, known for its communist statues, where they had a picnic available to purchase food, though the term "picnic" was controversially linked to racial history. But the word "picnic," with its alleged racial undertones, was a topic of hushed conversation among the women.

The following weekend, they decided to attend The Grape Boycott at Nature's Friends in Ringwood because Maddie didn't want to use her money to support the racially discriminatory neighborhood park or those "Crackers."

The United Farm Workers (UFW) and its leaders, including Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, spearheaded the Grape Boycott's in the 1960s and 1970s to draw attention to the mistreatment of working conditions experienced by grape farm workers, many of whom were Chicano and Filipino in California's vineyards. Maddie and Sandra learned about the event on New York radio station WBAI, a listener-supported radio station known for its progressive programming.

Nature Friends, established in the 1930s, defied societal norms by creating a welcoming space with a natural pool sourced from Winfield Farms. Despite facing prejudice and discrimination, they championed racial unity, providing a safe swimming haven for everyone, regardless of race. Beyond its German socialist roots, the site flourished with cultural activities.

However, during the McCarthy era, their socialist ideals and visits from figures like Pete Seeger drew criticism. Their stance led to confrontations with extremist groups, notably the bombing of their dining hall by the Minutemen, highlighting the period's widespread prejudices.

For Sandra and Maddie, the Grape Boycott event had been a novel experience. Still, their initial unease stemmed from the lack of food, which they had not anticipated, particularly as Maddie began complaining.

Ray Washington, the no-nonsense lifeguard, was steadfast in his regulations, pointing out that Maddie's under-18 daughter was not allowed in the deeper section without a swim test. This was met with Sandra's characteristic wit and audacity as she jabbed back, insinuating doubt in Ray's swimming capabilities compared to Maddie's daughter.

Yet, the day took another unexpected turn when Anton, another lifeguard who towered with an elegance of his own, approached Sandra and asked, "Who is the pretty girl in the flowered bathing suit? Will you be my girl?" Sandra would have typically said, in line with her feminist leanings, "I am a woman, not a girl," but he so enthralled her that she replied, "Yes." Today, Sandra's memorable encounter is commemorated with a **fundraising brick** inscription at the pool that reads, "Who's the pretty girl in the flower bathing suit?"



Anton offered Sandra some chicken; she was ecstatic. Thinking of her hungry friend Maddie, she excitedly brought the food to her, raving about the lifeguard's



*Anton at the Nature Friends Pool*

attractiveness. Maddie's cold reception surprised her.

Maddie quickly pulled Sandra away to chat privately;

Maddie said, "Who do you think made the chicken?"

and revealed that the lifeguard's girlfriend made the

chicken. Sandra felt a moral dilemma, considering it

politically incorrect at the time for a white woman to

flirt with a black man when he had a black girlfriend. Despite these initial reservations, she was deeply attracted to him, which led to a passionate 20-year relationship. While he may not have been entirely faithful, their shared joy outweighed the negatives.

Over time, when Anton traveled to see Sandra, he frequently brought his children with him. His son, whose mother was Ella, was known as Stuffy Stuff. When he visited, Anton would also bring Carla, Ella's other child from a previous relationship. Sandra welcomed the children, took them on walks, and showed them warmth, love, and support. As an adult, Stuffy Stuff continued to visit Sandra with his extensive family, showing the lasting bond formed over the years.

Although Sandra felt guilty about her relationship with Anton, she eventually reached out to Ella to apologize for being with him. Ella's understanding response highlighted the two women's respect for each other, acknowledging their genuine love for Anton and Sandra's kindness towards Ella's children.

Regardless of Anton's flaws and regardless of the rumors surrounding him, Sandra found him irresistible. Their time together was filled with excitement and passion. Even moments of anger and frustration were outweighed by the allure Anton possessed.

## **Chapter 7 - A House on Cedar Ave: The Heart of the Revolution**



*House on Cedar Ave. in Hackensack*

Sandra's home in Hackensack was modest, a charming brick house painted in her favorite color, purple. The home was where purple symbolized her favorite hue and the spirit of hope, resilience, and empowerment that defined her life's mission. Little did anyone

know this home would become the birthplace of a revolutionary movement, setting the stage for "Shelter Our Sisters." Sandra had been acutely aware of the challenges many women faced, especially those trapped in abusive relationships. As the cries for help from battered women grew louder, Sandra felt compelled to act. As more women reached out, Sandra's house transformed from a family home into a sanctuary. The living room, once filled with toys and children's books, now housed beds and personal belongings of women seeking safety. Sandra's children, who witnessed their mother's dedication, became part of this journey, learning early lessons on compassion, resilience, and the power of community.

Despite her demanding schedule, Sandra left an indelible mark on everyone she encountered. The walls of the house bore testament to the lives she had touched. Letters from former residents adorned the bulletin board in the kitchen, expressing gratitude and

acknowledging Sandra's profound impact on their lives. One note read, "You gave me the courage to go on. I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for you."

The year 1978 brought no respite to the whirlwind of Sandra's life. Anyone stepping into the home on Cedar Ave would instantly be immersed in a hive of activity. Sandra's day would often consist of sitting at the kitchen table, deep in conversation with a new arrival, while simultaneously handling calls from frantic women seeking an escape from their abusive situations. Her kitchen bore witness to the real stories of the women. It became a sanctuary where a fresh start was imagined over a tea. It was here that Sandra would gently chide one of her guests for smoking, managing to keep the rules without diminishing the warmth of her welcome.

Many individuals would leave food and various items at the side door of the shelter. Most of these donors chose to remain anonymous, not wanting to be openly associated with Sandra or the shelter. Years later, people that Sandra met on her travels at different venues admitted that they had experienced abusive fathers while growing up. These family secrets were closely guarded because many of these fathers held respectable and influential positions in society.

Sandra had always been unfairly accused of hating men and trying to break up families, accusations she found ridiculous. She emphasized that she had good relationships with men, but marriage wasn't something she wasn't actively seeking. Her primary commitment was to creating change, and she rejected the idea of living a mundane, predictable life where each day was a repetition of the last. She formerly shared the view that men were the enemy. Nevertheless, she learned through Malcolm X's lectures when he came to Meca that the

problem wasn't one of race or gender but of those in power and those who aren't. Strengthen Our Sisters is the only shelter that welcomes boys older than 13, directly opposing to the "man-hating" claim.

However, this unconventional way of life could be challenging, especially for her children. Although sometimes longing for a normal childhood, her children grew up profoundly understanding the world's realities. They had grown up with revolving doors of people in their house, which was sometimes challenging for them to accept. Their home wasn't just a house; it was a lesson. They learned early on the importance of standing up for what is right, even when inconvenient. Her children knew she was there for them when they needed her, but they also grasped that, ultimately, they were responsible for themselves.

As the number of residents grew, so did the challenges. Building inspectors appeared at her doorstep due to neighbor complaints. Neighbors whispered behind closed doors, questioning her intentions and the constant influx of strangers into the home. But Sandra, with her indomitable spirit, refused to evict the families. She knew domestic violence was an inhumane reality that must be confronted head-on. She even faced the threat of jail for her defiance.

Another barrier was enforcing an outdated ordinance, which demonstrated their seeming indifference to the plight of the women and children. According to this ordinance, up to three unrelated people could not reside in the same home. Sandra was steadfastly committed to the welfare of the women and children, and she wasn't willing to let an outdated ordinance stand in the way. She was successful in overturning the Hackensack, New Jersey,

ordinance. The nuns from Teaneck and the Ramapo College students from Mahwah, New Jersey, also reversed it.

## **Chapter 8 - The Rise of Shelter Our Sisters**

The home on Cedar Ave refused to comply with a superior court order to adhere to the city's occupancy laws. Overcrowding was a persistent issue, but some women still had nowhere to turn. Sandra said she would only comply once the county provided an alternative shelter.

The situation escalated as eviction orders were issued, and a Superior Court Judge ruled that women and children must leave Sandra's home urgently, but they had nowhere to go. In addition, when beaten women arrived at her door, she would create room even though it was overcrowded because the women would say, "I finally got the courage to leave but, I have nowhere else to go."

The residents contemplated legal actions against the county and other towns to compel them to sponsor shelters for battered wives and children. Sandra was not one to back down. She marched, staged sit-ins, threatened legal action, and defied court orders to protect the women and children from their abusers. The county freeholders refused financial aid to battered women but allocated \$500,000 to build an animal shelter. In typical Sandra fashion, she brought a battered woman and her dog to the following freeholders meeting and challenged them to take in the dog and shelter the mother and her child. To draw attention to the cause, she also brought 13 small dogs to the meeting.

There was intense resentment toward the freeholders' careless handling of a serious issue involving women's shelters. They proposed conducting additional "study and research" instead of taking immediate action to address the urgent need. They proposed that additional



"study and research" be conducted instead of taking immediate action to address the urgent need. Sandra found this approach exasperating. It was evident to her and many others that women in the community needed immediate assistance and shelter, not another round of academic investigation.

In expressing her deep-seated frustration, Sandra quoted the words of the indomitable Florynce "Flo" Kennedy: "When you have a truck on your foot, you don't go to the library to find out how much it weighs; you get it off!" To express her dissatisfaction, Sandra found another unique and symbolic way to drive home her point. She gave each freeholder a pair of pink construction paper lips one of the residents made. Pink, often associated with femininity, was not merely decorative. The pink lips symbolized their "lip service" to the cause—promising action but delivering none, paying only verbal homage without concrete steps to assist battered women.

A woman named Karen was one of the many lives the shelter had touched. In a heartfelt testament to the efforts, Karen expressed that the shelter had provided her with more assistance and support in six weeks than any other entity or individual had in six months.

Karen's connection to influential figures was evident when she reached out to her father, a friend of Anne Klein, then the Commissioner of Corrections. Recognizing the profound impact the shelter support had on her, Karen penned a letter detailing our efforts and the difference it made in her life. In response, Anne Klein took note and passed the commendation to the Division of Youth and Family Services and the state law enforcement and planning agency. There was a glimmer of hope that this would translate into financial aid or recognition for the organization.

However, the funds were instead awarded to the Community Action Program (CAP). CAP had not demonstrated the same commitment or results in assisting women in dire circumstances. To add insult to injury, instead of utilizing the funds to create a safe environment for the women, CAP placed the women and children in the nearby Sportsplex Motel with no supportive services. Taxis would transport them rather than supportive advocates. There, these vulnerable women were further subjected to inappropriate advances; men were propositioning them, further deepening their trauma. The funds, which could have been used to help the women, were exhausted with little to show in terms of positive outcomes. The situation was a poignant reminder of the systemic issues that sometimes plague bureaucratic decision-making.

In 1978, the Bergen County Board of Freeholders finally voted to provide Shelter Our Sisters funds to support battered wives. However, this funding came with a stipulation that the program should aim to reunite abused women with their husbands. This provision was criticized by Sandra, who expressed concerns that it might lead to perpetuating abuse and create a new generation of victims. Sandra emphasized that the shelter's primary goal was to ensure the safety of women and children. She stated that if a woman voluntarily wanted to return to her husband in a healthy family environment, she would not oppose it. However, if the woman suffered humiliation, physical abuse, or torture, she would not advocate for her to return to save the family.

Sandra's perseverance and tireless work ultimately paid off when she acquired money for the battered women's refuge. This was a critical turning point since Shelter Our Sisters was the first shelter of its sort in the nation.

The shelter once again became overcrowded, so Sandra found another home in Teaneck on a college campus. She moved everyone in without getting township approvals because she was in a rush and knew the township would complain. They ultimately won the required permissions after numerous fines and protracted legal disputes. After achieving this goal, Sandra built second-stage housing in New Jersey's Leonia, Bogota, and Ramsey.

A committee was established during discussions regarding allocating essential funds for the shelter. Tom Connor, the director of the Family Life Center, led this committee. His co-chair was Frances Trainer, the Social Security Administration assistant manager in Hackensack, New Jersey. With her conservative demeanor, Frances starkly contrasted many involved in the process. Her demeanor was formal and outdated, and she frequently wore her trademark three-piece polyester suits. Her most notable expression of distress was tossing her pencil in the air and exclaiming, "Oh, crum!"



*Frances Treanor*

A memorable incident between Frances and Sandra took place at Sandra's residence. To create a calming atmosphere, Sandra offered Frances loose peppermint tea. Frances's hands were shaking while sipping her tea. It was only much later that Sandra learned that Frances, perhaps due to her limited exposure to different lifestyles or her inherent conservatism, mistakenly believed she had been served marijuana.

The complexity of their relationship took another turn when Frances learned from the freeholders that Sandra was a lesbian. This revelation made Frances hesitant in her professional dealings with Sandra. However, despite any personal biases she might have had, Frances

recognized the sincerity and dedication with which Sandra championed the cause. With time, she chose to rise above any prejudices, realizing the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for action. Frances gradually became a supporter of "Shelter Our Sisters." Her commitment to the cause grew to the extent that she eventually took on a leadership role, becoming the board chair.

## **Chapter 9 - The Bureaucratic Shift**

Shelter Our Sisters faced a complex tapestry of internal conflicts over their 17-year journey in the intricate web of advocacy and social change. Initially, it was an undesirable position to be on the shelter board; however, as the social landscape evolved, the position grew in prestige, attracting individuals with varied perspectives.

Sandra clashed with board members who wanted to bureaucratize and "boardify" the program. For Sandra, the shelter was losing its heart, becoming rigid and cold, unable to meet the needs of the women it served. Sandra's daughter Maria coined the phrase boardification.

The shelter's transformation into a more formalized institution, with a board of directors and increased administrative demands, was moving away from its original mission. While it provided stability and the potential for broader impact, it also introduced complexities and a sense of detachment from the movement's grassroots origins. Sandra, ever the visionary, saw the need for a different approach. She recognized that her passion lay in direct action and personal connection rather than bureaucratic administration. The clash of ideals was evident—a grassroots lesbian feminist against regimented professionals, an earth mother challenging the establishment. A board member's remark that "a lesbian running a battered women's shelter is worse than a child molester running a daycare center" caused one of the most heated

arguments. Sandra had asked this board member to write her statement, but the board member refused. Sandra also encountered resistance from the board when she tried to help a woman contemplating suicide. Even though the woman's therapist attested to her safety, the board resisted Sandra's choice and even moved her office to stop her from answering hotline calls.

The rift between Sandra and the board became public knowledge. The media spotlighted the internal conflicts, painting Sandra as a maverick at odds with the institution she had helped establish. The controversy did not deter her. Instead, it gave her a new platform to raise awareness about the cause she held dear. She had a strong base of supporters, including conservative Republican Senator Gerald Cardinale, who applauded her for her dedication and steadfast commitment to the women and children she helped.

In a pivotal meeting held in her office, the board chairman confronted Sandra with the request for her resignation. Sandra, true to her unyielding nature, responded with unwavering determination. "I will never resign," she declared firmly. "You can offer me \$20,000 or even a million dollars, and I would never step down unless it were for the betterment of the women and children." Despite the mounting pressures and internal strife, she wasn't about to let go of the organization she had built from the ground up.

One point of contention was whether to require the women to undergo psychological counseling as part of their alleged recovery process. Advocates of this approach believed that professional counseling was essential to help survivors heal from the deep emotional wounds caused by domestic violence. Sandra had some misgivings about making counseling necessary.

She believed that battered women's support groups, where women and children may learn from and strengthen one another, were more beneficial.

As bureaucracy slowly seeped in, the board began to include individuals whose beliefs diverged sharply from the shelter's core values. This divergence became evident when cook Lulu, in a gesture of goodwill, decided to serve shrimp creole, only to face backlash from board members who questioned why the women deserved such 'luxuries.' This wasn't just about food. It was a stark indicator of the growing divide between the shelter's foundational principles and the board's emerging mindset, which preferred dictating terms to the women rather than empowering them.

The dispute had garnered significant attention, with numerous inquiries and reports from various sources, including The New York Times. It was noted that the sheer volume of people involved in the dispute had been overwhelming. Sandra was adamant in her convictions and thought the board's actions were more than merely administrative disputes; in her eyes, they were nothing less than criminal.

This resolve brought her to the well-known criminal attorney Frank Luciano, whose name was frequently spoken in hushed tones and whose reputation preceded him. Luciano epitomizes seasoned talent and charisma with his dapper charm, white hair, and recognizable red handkerchief. He decided to take on Sandra's case pro gratis basis, referring to her as the "inimitable Miss Ramos". "Luciano's plan was predicated on a past instance in which a doctor had been fired for disobeying the board's rulings after saving someone's life. This situation was the ideal analogy to show that professionals shouldn't be punished for upholding their morals. However, the board's lawyer, Marvin Gladstone, discovered that the appeals court had

dismissed the case Luciano was relying on in a surprising turn of events. The fact that the doctor's firing in the earlier case had been deemed proper had the effect of undercutting Luciano's defense strategy and raising doubt about Sandra's victory.

The Board of Trustees insisted that Sandra was an at-will worker subject to dismissal without justification. In 1986, Sandra was fired from the shelter she had founded.

## **Chapter 10 - A New Beginning**

In 1987, after her children had gone to college, Sandra decided to retreat to her peaceful summer purple cottage in rural Ringwood. She envisioned days spent writing a book and enjoying the tranquility of her surroundings. But life had other plans for her.

Every day, Sandra embarked on a spiritual journey, hiking up a mountain trail near her purple quonset hut home, nestled amidst the tranquil beauty of nature. Her incredible journey was fueled by the power and direction she found here, by a tumbling waterfall, where she sought comfort. It was "a Jewish station of the cross," as Sandra put it.

Sandra's entire life was and still is decorated in purple, from her clothes, sunglasses, furniture, 1986 Volvo, and house. Her unique home's interior still features a combination of images, newspaper clippings, and artwork that looks like a flower garden from the 1960s movement. She called it "vivid, exciting, and her favorite place in the world."

Her purple period began with the purchase of violet sweatpants from a Salvation Army, deemed too hideous to wear by friends. Unfazed, she embraced the color, wearing it frequently.

Pleas for help began to follow her, even to her serene cottage. When she sought assistance for these desperate victims, she discovered a stark reality—no shelters for homeless or battered women were available in the Northern Passaic County region of New Jersey.

Women began contacting Sandra for assistance. When Sandra was in the pizza shop, a woman with long red hair approached Sandra and asked her if she was a Wiccan because she was wearing a crystal around her waist. Sandra said that she was. The woman told Sandra that she had six children, that her husband was going into a drug treatment program, and that she had found a house rental but didn't have the money to put down the deposit.

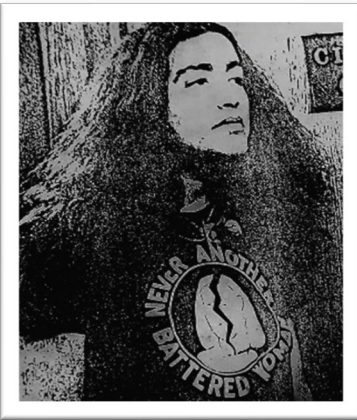
Sandra and her team raised the money they needed to rent a refuge in Wanaque. However, she wanted to help the women. She called local churches and the United Way, and they said they would replace the money with their weekend collections. Despite their assurances, the church could not generate enough money to replace it entirely. Sandra received a call and was visited by Vince Pavesse, the United Way Director, who spoke with her. He said, "Sandra, I've heard you've been making trouble since you came to Passaic County. Is that true?" Sandra hesitated, and then she proceeded to say, "Yes." To Sandra's surprise, he replied, "Good, we need more people like that." They quickly grew close after he enthusiastically repaid the funds, and she was able to assist the woman with the rent deposit and buy the shelter house in Wanaque.

Always candid and loyal, Vince decided it was essential for Sandra to be aware of the whispers circulating about her in the county meetings. Vince invited her to the next meeting to clarify misconceptions and address people's concerns about her work. However, when Vince



introduced her to the room and called on the individual to voice their issues, the room was engulfed in an awkward silence. No one came forward.

In later years, Vince died suddenly, and Vince's family knew how much Sandra meant to him. They buried him with a drum rattle that Sandra had given him.



*Sandra wearing the Logo - Women  
with Cracked Face*

In 1990, "Strengthen Our Sisters" emerged, but not without a fight. Shelter Our Sisters", the shelter she was fired from took legal action against Sandra, claiming she had infringed upon their rights by using a logo with an image of a **cracked woman's face**. This logo was prominently featured on numerous materials associated with Sandra, including t-shirts, buttons,

written materials, and more. They contended that she didn't have the authority to use this logo. The plot, however, became more complicated when a woman named Fern, the logo's creator, entered the courtroom. She claimed that Sandra was the design's inspiration, and she wished for her to have it.

The legal wrangling didn't end there. "Shelter Our Sisters" also took issue with Sandra using the name "Save Our Sisters," arguing that it was similar to their name and implied that Sandra was capitalizing on their good name. The bold assertion was that if not for Sandra's pioneering work, "Shelter Our Sisters" wouldn't have even existed, let alone have a "good name" to capitalize on.

Rosemary Truland, Sandra's pro bono attorney and friend, played a pivotal role in navigating this legal maze. The settlement agreement said that Sandra could not use Save Our Sisters "or any reasonable facsimile." Sandra's attorney crossed off any reasonable facsimile,

and the Judge signed it. All Sandra had to do was change one letter in the name, which would have been acceptable. However, aiming for a name that resonated more with her mission, she adopted a new name: "Strengthen Our Sisters."

In 1991, Strengthen Our Sisters found its ideal base—a 4.5-acre site that would become a hub of hope. Grants from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and the Federal Home Loan Bank paved the way for renovations and the expansion of the shelter house.

In 1994, the organization reached a new milestone by purchasing a daycare center with an attached five-bedroom house. Quality daycare and a certified preschool program benefited shelter residents and community children. The attached house became an annex shelter for expectant mothers and new babies, where the "Start Ahead" program focused on the well-being of mothers and their infants.



Strengthen Our Sisters didn't stop at sheltering; it took a comprehensive approach. An old, refurbished church building became home to the shelter thrift store and the Valerie Vandunk Advocacy Center, an outreach program named after one of the shelter's board members whose husband brutally murdered. In her memory and as a testament to the urgency of the cause, the shelter

organized a march. The rally began at the shelter, and the procession moved to the police station, symbolically marking the importance of law enforcement's role in protecting victims of domestic violence. Valerie's untimely and brutal demise also shed light on a grave issue: the

perception and handling of domestic violence calls by law enforcement. The heartbreaking fact that her daughters' frantic calls may have been dismissed as a "prank" underscores the dire need for better training and awareness among emergency responders. Valerie's story became an urgent call to action, stressing the importance of always taking such reports seriously and responding promptly.

In 1999, the organization expanded further by purchasing a women's transitional shelter program. This large building, equipped with several apartments, was renovated to provide supportive transitional programs for single women.

In 2001, a notable turn of events took place. Sandra, with her spirit and dedication to the cause, received the top honor in the Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award. The accolade came with a generous prize of \$50,000.

But instead of keeping the prize money for herself, in a gesture that epitomized her selflessness and vision, Sandra donated the entire sum to the shelter. With that donation, she could purchase a new sanctuary for those in need – a house that, in homage to its origins and Sandra's award, was aptly named the 'Berry House'.

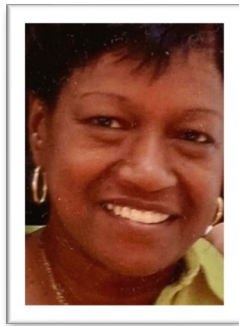
In 2006, the house Strengthen Our Sisters had been renting, endearingly termed the 'Sunflower House', became a focal point of our mission. The beautiful structure, once a bed and breakfast, seemed ideal, especially for older women who had moved past their child-rearing years.

Monica, the owner of the house, wasn't just an owner; she had worn the hat of a house mother for years, pouring her heart and soul into the role while awaiting the completion of the sale.

However, this endeavor could have been smoother. Whispers around town suggested that local authorities eyed the property for conversion back into a bed and breakfast. To add to the complexity, nuns were approaching us, facing eviction from their convent in Irvington, seeking sanctuary. These challenges demanded intervention. After numerous discussions and some intense negotiations with the town manager, by 2006, we triumphantly secured our Certificate of Occupancy. The women who would call this place home were not just handed keys to a house; they were given assurance, security, and, most importantly, a sense of belonging.



*Faye Blumberg*



*Helen Shiver*

The Faye House was renamed by the residents in a kind tribute to Sandra's mother Faye. In Sandra's eyes, Helen Shiver was changed from a caregiver to a sister by her unflinching support of Sandra's mother Faye in her later years. Her generosity and commitment will always be cherished.

Strengthen Our Sisters embraced a holistic approach, providing food, shelter, clothing, legal and supportive services, childcare, job training, and workshops on life skills. Workshops covered parenting skills, communication, self-esteem, stress management, and self-help. The women also had access to computer classes and GED preparation. A dedicated advocacy staff helped them with restraining orders, emergency assistance, and securing permanent housing.

But what genuinely set Strengthen Our Sisters apart was its cooperative and non-hierarchical structure. The women themselves played a pivotal role in the shelter's decision-making process. They planned meals, shared responsibilities, and embodied the shelter's

powerful theme: "pass it on." As women left the shelter, they joined a circle of support where bonds were formed, empowerment was celebrated, and independence and self-sufficiency were nurtured.

Through the vision and tireless dedication of Sandra Ramos, Strengthen Our Sisters became a beacon of hope for homeless, battered women and their children. It stood a testament to the power of compassion, resilience, and collective effort in adversity. It was as if



Sandra was orchestrating her encore performance. With no bureaucracy to bog her down, she was doing it her way once more. To some, it was like witnessing the second coming of Sandra Ramos.

Sandra's style remained consistent through the years, down to her secondhand clothes and the 1986 purple Volvo she drove. Her daily routine included meditation

and swimming to keep her in shape mentally and physically. She knew that her mission was to support battered women and create a more nurturing world, a duty she felt deeply. "As long as we have a society where children are beaten, raped, and molested, and women are not respected and loved," she declared, "everyone has a moral obligation to do something about it." So, as she had done in 1970 when she first took in a battered woman, she continues to stand firm 50 years later. Sandra's enduring legacy is a testament to the power of compassion and unyielding determination.

Strengthen Our Sisters, with its seven shelters and a 3.5-million-dollar budget, was a significant entity in the community. Boasting a 55-strong paid staff team, the remarkable thing

about this organization was that the majority were former clients. This showcased the transformative impact of their services and gave hope and inspiration to the new clients, seeing firsthand the positive turn their lives could take.

The landscape changed drastically when welfare reform was passed. With her typical candor, Sandra called it the "Welfare Deform." Many people suddenly became ineligible for



*Xenia and Sandra*

vouchers for various reasons - either they were already receiving SSD, had exceeded their allocated time, or had other stipulations set by the reform.

Facing an unprecedented crisis, the staff of Strengthen

Our Sisters made a remarkable decision. Prioritizing

mission over monetary considerations, they voted to

continue supporting these individuals. This decision came

at a heavy price. The absence of vouchers meant a severe dip in funds. To manage their limited resources, Sandra laid herself off first, despite her modest earnings of \$775 bi-weekly.

Eventually, the financial constraints resulted in the laying off 55 staff members. Now, the

shelter is only managed by devoted volunteers who remained loyal during the layoff. Xenia

Danko, who personifies commitment and determination, is one of the individuals. Xenia stuck

to her promise even after the shelter lost its funding. She has been leading shelter operations

for over 27 years, proving of her unwavering commitment to the cause.

When an individual possesses a voucher, the welfare system often pays the shelter a significant bill for their services. Consequently, there's a persistent push to find options,

although limited, to transition them out of the shelter. For those without a voucher, the

situation becomes even more challenging. Not only does Strengthen Our Sisters receive no compensation from the Board of Social Services for these individuals, but the absence of Temporary Rental Assistance or Section 8 housing makes it difficult for them to find stable housing.

The strong push to secure Section 8 housing for everyone has been met with challenges. A prevalent issue is landlords' reluctance to rent to the clients, further complicating their path to independence.

In the face of financial challenges, the shelter adapted by integrating its board members directly into its day-to-day operations. Rather than just governing from a distance, these board members became active stakeholders, personally involved in the shelter's activities and services. Senator Cardinale championed this innovative model at the state level, securing its recognition and acceptance. This approach not only ensured operational continuity for the shelter but also deepened the commitment and responsibility of the board members, genuinely embodying a hands-on approach to governance and service.

Sandra feels that Strengthen Our Sisters is blessed with a dedicated board, some of whose members have consistently shown their generosity, aiding the shelter financially and ensuring they can keep their doors open.

Apart from the board members, the shelter also has individuals who, moved by the cause, extend their support. One such heartwarming gesture came from a regular supporter who generously donated \$24,600 to honor Sandra's upcoming birthday. This act of kindness, though monetary, goes beyond the amount; it reflects the community's love, support, and belief in the shelter's vision.

As domestic violence shelters became more recognized, they faced challenges beyond just bortion. Batterers started exploiting the system, often flipping the script by portraying the victim. Disturbingly, many of these abusers, some of whom were also child molesters, secured custody of or unsupervised visitation with their children, leading to continued abuse. This systemic failure brought immense suffering to numerous women and children, with many children becoming suicidal or resorting to self-harm.

Sandra took an active role in addressing these concerns. In 2005, she collaborated with The Mother's Custody Conference, a collective of protective mothers from around the globe who lost custody of their children to molesters, rapists, and abusers. These mothers, many of whom grappled with severe emotional trauma, united at the conference, establishing support networks and seeking legal help. Unfortunately, obtaining legal recourse was challenging due to the high fees of lawyers. Many of the abusive perpetrators, backed by substantial resources, could afford strong legal representation, further perpetuating this dire issue.

## **Chapter 11 - Victims Stories**

### **Susan's Story**

Susan, a resident of the "Strengthen Our Sisters" shelter, has been living in fear due to the constant stalking by her estranged husband. For months, he has been terrorizing her by stalking her at the shelter, whispering her name at night, and following her every move. He vandalized her car and that of a friend, and continuously sent her threatening letters and made ominous phone calls.



A series of things happened when he found her in the West Milford shelter. State officials advised the shelter to ask Susan to leave when her abuser found out where she was. This is due to the possibility that keeping her there longer could have endangered the safety of the other occupants. Sandra refused, claiming she had nowhere else to go and she had a support network at the shelter.

This relentless stalking has forced Susan, and many others like her, into a repetitive cycle of seeking court protection against their stalkers. This cycle involves the stalker's release from jail, subsequent harassment of the victim, and the victim filing for contempt charges due to violation of restraining orders - a process Susan has endured nearly eight times.

However, there's hope on the horizon. Susan, and others in her situation, place their hopes on a proposed state law aiming to criminalize stalking. Drawing inspiration from California's anti-stalking legislation from 1995, which came into existence after the tragic murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer by her stalker, New Jersey aims to make stalking a criminal offense. These laws, initially designed to protect public figures, now promise protection for everyone. Stalking is defined by behaviors like following, threatening, and other intimidating actions directed towards an individual. Victims can obtain restraining or protective orders against stalkers, and those convicted face penalties such as fines, probation, and imprisonment. The extent of the punishment often depends on the nature of the stalking behavior and any past convictions.



## Cathy Lee Story

Cathy Lee is a technical sergeant serving in the U.S. Air Force. Upon returning from a program at her base, she identified signs of abuse on her son, who had been under the care of her husband's family. As the child grew older and became more articulate, he

revealed the alarming truth that he had been abused by members of his father's family. Several reports from different authorities corroborated the child's statements, providing a solid base for Cathy Lee's concerns.

In 2004, a significant incident raised alarms about the involvement of Cathy Lee's husband in the abuse. Her son displayed overtly sexualized behavior that indicated his father might have been abusing him. Despite the accumulating evidence, Cathy Lee struggled to come to terms with the possibility that her husband, someone she loved and trusted, could be an abuser.

The situation reached a boiling point in 2005 when her husband decided to sue for divorce. In the court, he cunningly used Cathy Lee's military duties against her, suggesting her potential deployments made her unfit to care for their son. The court proceedings took an unexpected and distressing turn when the presiding judge seemed to be overtly dismissive of Cathy Lee's claims. The judge disregarded critical evidence, including video and audio recordings, which could have substantiated the child's abuse. More shockingly, during the testimonies, the judge exhibited an unprofessional demeanor, laughing at some of the presented evidence.

To Cathy Lee's dismay, she was accused of inventing abuse stories, and the court took a drastic step by granting full custody of the child to the husband, the alleged abuser. She was restricted to seeing her son during supervised visits, for which she was required to pay. Cathy Lee felt the court was biased against her from the beginning, thinking there was a preconceived plot to undermine her credibility. She identified an inherent problem within the family court system, which, in her opinion, frequently dismisses genuine claims of incest and other forms of abuse, especially when mothers raise them.

However, Cathy Lee did not remain silent. She took proactive steps against the judge, leading to the latter's premature retirement. But this victory was not enough to rectify the corruption and bias that seemed to pervade the system. Cathy Lee's access to her son remained limited, and her trust in the judicial system was shattered.

Drawing from her harrowing experience, Cathy Lee began advocating for women to take radical measures to protect themselves and their children from potential abuse. She recommended that women consider sperm banks as an alternative to traditional relationships to avoid the possibility of facing abusive partners.

The article poses a pressing question about the role of institutions meant to protect the vulnerable. It delves into the systemic disbelief of claims related to incest and the prejudice against mothers within the legal system. The narrative suggests that mothers are often trapped in prolonged legal battles, depleting them financially and emotionally. In many cases, the system which should support them labels them as unstable, further victimizing them. The story underscores the critical need for a comprehensive reform in the family court system to ensure justice and protection for all.

## Chapter 12 -My Sacred Companion



Sandra and Annie's story began 40 years ago in a club where Annie's then-lover performed. Sandra was there with a woman who, according to a straight friend of hers, was Sandra's ideal partner. Sandra, though, was more drawn to Annie than to this woman. They hit it off right away. Later, at the

Ecology Center, where Annie was honored for her Birthday, they reconnected. Since Annie did not eat sweets, they brought a cantaloupe with a candle to Highpoint, a nearby hiking trail that led to the top of the mountain.

Annie was a spiritual individual, believing in signs and messages. She once felt compelled to draw her heart atop a mountain for Sandra. Sandra's children, upon meeting Annie, mistakenly thought her to be of black descent because of her olive skin and turban scarf around her head. It was a detail they only clarified months later. Regardless of any misconceptions, they took a liking to Annie. They candidly expressed that, of all Sandra's lovers, Annie was the only "normal" one, showcasing their genuine affection for her to this day.

Annie was a breath of fresh air in Sandra's life. They weren't just lovers but true companions and best friends who traveled together, seeking adventures even on a tight budget. One of their memorable escapades was camping out in Hawaii. Despite not having much money, they found joy in simple adventures, like staying at the 7-Day Adventist camp.

Annie always stood by Sandra, especially when others doubted her. She had unwavering faith in Sandra's projects and always believed in her, even when others would voice skepticism. Her support was not just verbal; she was there for Sandra, side by side, through thick and thin.

On one occasion, while on a bus trip to Washington, they encountered another couple who, unlike them, were quite argumentative and hostile towards each other. Sandra called this couple "naggy draggy". Upon observing Sandra and Annie's mutual respect and understanding, this couple expressed a desire to have a relationship like theirs when they grew older. Sandra, with her signature wit, said, "Why don't you start now?"

Annie was not just a beacon of support for Sandra, but she also had her causes that she passionately pursued. Annie was not just a beacon of support for Sandra, but she also had her own causes that she passionately pursued. At a time when Sandra's shelter needed financial assistance, Annie stepped in, lending money, and making it clear she had no expectations of repayment. Her generosity wasn't confined to monetary aspects; it was a hallmark of her character.

Annie was a dedicated environmentalist. She fiercely opposed the local quarry activities that threatened to destroy a mountain. With Sandra by her side, they traveled to Trenton to lobby against these destructive actions. On one such occasion, Senator Gerald Cardinale had proposed a bill that Annie opposed. Known for his friendship with Sandra, he agreed to meet with Annie to discuss the matter. Originally meant to last five minutes, their meeting stretched to almost an hour. Such was the power of Annie's conviction and the strength of her argument that Senator Cardinale, swayed by her words, decided to abstain from voting on his own bill.

Sandra's support for Annie was unwavering. When Annie became a minister at the Unitarian Church, Sandra was right there, championing her. Their bond was more than personal; they were allies in various causes, mutually supporting and amplifying each other's voices.

Annie's charm and influence extended beyond just her personal sphere; she made a mark wherever she went, especially at the school where she taught. Targeted for "troubled youth", the institution was a challenging environment, but Annie navigated it gracefully. They both felt that the children were victims of a troubled society, which often tends to blame the victim.

Annie's unique methods of imparting wisdom were both entertaining and effective. Her unconventional demonstration of a condom generated laughter and drove home a crucial point about responsibility and safety.

Annie's advocacy was more expansive than in classroom settings. Alongside Sandra, she would also address topics of domestic abuse, and the duo would not shy away from confronting and rectifying any misconceptions the youth held. This was a testament to their commitment to spread awareness and combat stereotypes.

Annie was not just an educator; she was a trailblazer. Her determination to organize the Haitian workers at the school into a union showcased her unwavering commitment to social justice. Her efforts were recognized and deeply appreciated by the workers who, for the first time, felt they had a voice and a means to advocate for their rights. However, as with any pioneering effort, resistance was inevitable. The administration, threatened by the newfound

power and unity of the workers, was not supportive. Tensions arose, but Annie, true to her character, remained steadfast.

Adding a layer of allure to Annie's persona was her familial link to the renowned singer Tony Bennett. While many might get starstruck or be overly enamored by this connection, Sandra had a different perspective. Although Sandra attended many events featuring Tony, courtesy of Annie, she never regarded him primarily as a superstar. Instead, she appreciated the man behind the fame. Tony's gentle, kind demeanor, particularly his evident love and regard for Annie, endeared him to Sandra.

One of the most stunning locations on earth is the Highlands Natural Pool, a location that Sandra and Annie treasure. It is one of the seven wonders of the world in Sandra's opinion, through much of which she has journeyed. The pool was shut down when the Ethical Culture turned up ownership to the Audubon. Sandra and a group of others led the local community's demonstrations in response to this action. They used innovative tactics to get the pool reopened, including bringing rubber ducks and water wings to the home of the board chair in protest and raising awareness of the problem through TV appearances and banners. The protestors also went to the job of another board member with flyers showing prison bars saying, "Wanted ..... Open the poo!".

In one instance, Sandra's name was accidentally written next to a board member's picture as it appeared on a television new channel. Somewhat sarcastically, Sandra complained that this "high class woman" "was ruining her reputation.

In the end, the community was able to take control of the pool and has maintained it for the last twenty years.

Fast forward today, the board of the pool voted to close the pool and recreation area in the late afternoon. Even though most of the board members are admirable and very dedicated, this new regulation in early closure is supposed to save money. But it may have saved hundreds but has lost thousands. One need only look at the empty grill areas and tables each weekend where many people no longer come.

The pool's initial atmosphere of freedom and unity has been diminished by the plethora of rule signs. As a tribute to the pool's history as a place for activists and varied communities to unite and revive, Sandra wishes to amend these policies for the upcoming year by emphasizing joy and healing. She suggests including the word "Joy" as a final sign.

Annie, a beacon of strength and advocacy, is now navigating significant health challenges. In the past, with a heart full of generosity, she had lent money to support causes she believed in. Today, as she grapples with her hardships, there's a need to repay Annie those funds. We are reaching out to the community, not just to return the financial support she so freely gave but to stand by her, as she always stood by others. It's a testament to the enduring bond between Sandra and Annie that, despite life's trials and tribulations, they remain steadfast by each other's side. Their journey together continues, a poignant reminder of the power of enduring friendship and shared purpose.



## Chapter 13 - Conclusion: The Purple Legacy



The chapters of Sandra's life are like a voyage of perseverance, heart, and unyielding spirit. Sandra's retort was blunt and insightful, challenging the odd assertion that wearing purple on a Thursday implied she was a lesbian. She did not wear the purple pants just to disprove this false narrative, but also to make a loud statement against prejudice and narrow-mindedness.

But as we learn more, we see that Sandra's adventure is not just about exploring uncharted territory or defying convention. It tells the story of a woman's unwavering love for a particular color and how it connected to her life's mission. Her love of purple symbolized her retreat in the woods, which provided comfort and quiet.

Sandra's beliefs in the power of energy and her meditations by the nearby water streams speak to a deeper connection with the world around her. While some might dismiss her as merely eccentric, there's an undeniable force behind her actions, which urges us to introspect our beliefs and the lengths to express them.

Sandra is naturally good with people. Whether they be former Ramapo College or William Paterson University students she taught, or strangers she meets while participating in daily prayer sessions, she listens closely and opens herself up to others. She calls herself a Wiccan but has also briefly identified as a Catholic throughout her spiritual journey. She places great importance on the goddess of the nurturing power of women's energy.

Sandra believes in her power to manifest what she wants and isn't shy about seeking private or corporate aid to support the shelters.

"For me, every rock, every flower, every drop of water holds energy," she explained. "And when I touch them and communicate my intentions, I believe that energy ripples into the world". If we all did this, even in small ways, consider the positive change we could create."



At 82, she is a tireless advocate for battered women and their children. Her commitment to the people who come into her life is intensely personal; she gets to know each of them, breaking the anonymity often found in other shelters. In the tapestry of activism, Sandra

Ramos stands out in bright purple. Her life has been anything but ordinary. Yet, at its core, it's a story of love, strength, and an unwavering belief in fairness. Sandra Ramos's life story is a colorful one, quite literally. However, she hopes that people remember her as a woman filled with love, energy, and strength, dedicated to making the world a better place. "Blessed Be".

## Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to every selfless individual who has sacrificed their comforts and invested immeasurable time and energy in helping to keep the shelter going strong and making the world a better place. Your unique talents, hard work, and dedication are greatly appreciated. *(You know who you are!)*

A heartfelt acknowledgment to our current board: Your diligent efforts to uphold and support the shelter's mission have been the backbone of this endeavor. Your dedication shines brightly, guiding the way for others to follow.

Lastly, but most profoundly, to the resilient women and children who have crossed our threshold, facing dangers and surmounting challenges, your strength and transformation inspire us every day. The courage you've displayed and the adversities you've conquered stand as enduring testaments to the human spirit.

While it's imperative to extend thanks to everyone who played a part in helping produce this book, I want to acknowledge:

**Lena:** Your magic with words was instrumental. Not only did you edit and co-write, but you gracefully wove my thoughts into coherent narratives.

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*To everyone who has touched on this project, directly or indirectly, thank you from the core of my being. Your collective spirit and dedication have brought these pages to life. Blessed Be.*







