

## Erotic author Zane is famous but anonymous

By [Ben Nuckols](#) - The Associated Press

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UPPER MARLBORO, Md. — Zane never intended to surround herself in mystery and intrigue. The author, whose steamy sex novels have propelled her onto The New York Times list of best sellers, says if she could do it over, she'd have chosen a less provocative pseudonym.



Best-Selling Author - Zane

About a decade ago, she was in an America Online chat room and needed to call herself something. She picked Zane because it was the first thing that popped into her head; she's always liked the name.

When she started writing erotic fiction in her spare time and e-mailing it to friends and online acquaintances, it made sense to keep calling herself Zane — after all, she couldn't be sure who was reading her work. Then she developed a following and discovered she could sell a book, and Zane was destined to stay Zane.

"If I had known that this was going to actually end up being a writing pseudonym, I would have picked something with a first and last name," Zane says.

More than 2.7 million copies of her books are in print, she's a mainstay on the Essence magazine list of best sellers, and two titles, "Afterburn" and the anthology "Love Is Never Painless," were New York Times best sellers.

The next frontier for the author: movies and television. She has approved a script for "Addicted," an adaptation of her biggest-selling novel, about a woman who seeks counseling for sex addiction. She's negotiating a deal to turn a collection of her stories into a cable-TV miniseries. She's also a publisher who runs Strebor Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster with more than 50 authors, many of whom get a sales boost from their association with Zane.

Not bad for someone who never planned to be a writer. Zane, the daughter of a theologian and an elementary school teacher, graduated from Howard University in Washington, D.C., with a degree in chemical engineering.

Whenever I had creative writing assignments and stuff in school, the teachers would almost be shocked at what I turned in because it would be so far-fetched and so imaginative," Zane says. "Most of my teachers told me I should be a writer, but I just never took it seriously until I got bored enough to do it."

Boredom hit in 1997, when Zane was living in North Carolina, working as a sales representative. She began writing erotic stories to pass the time after her children went to bed. (She now has a 19-year-old son, a 12-year-old daughter and a 3-year-old son.) The stories developed a following on the Internet, and she self-published "The Sex Chronicles" before landing a deal with Simon & Schuster.

Zane tapped into a market that craves her honest, unvarnished perspective on sexuality. Her books send a "Sex and the City"-like message that it's OK to celebrate your libido. In person, the 40-year-old author is equally assertive — but she's no vixen. Stylish but not outlandish, with a round, youthful face and a comfortably fleshy figure, Zane looks like the suburban working mom that she is.

Zane presents a mixture of accessibility and reserve. She sometimes answers the phone at Strebor. She reads her e-mail and responds to as many messages as she can — dishing out sex advice to eager fans.

But at the same time, she guards her privacy. She did not allow herself to be photographed or interviewed until 2004, at the onset of her first book tour. She said she "came out" then only because con artists were starting to host book signings claiming to be her.



Zane at one of her book signing

She's more comfortable now with her public, partly because as a publisher, she has to help her authors sell their books. But she's not forthcoming with personal details. Now divorced, she speaks only vaguely about the man she's dating

"There's no point in it other than to affect my privacy and have people showing up at my house. And I have a 3-year-old child, so that's my concern," she says.

She also wants to spare her family, particularly her father, from undue criticism. "Whereas most people don't have an issue with what I do, there are those who are self-righteous and do have an

issue," Zane says. "So it's just not fair for other people who have absolutely nothing to do with it to be affected by that, because they didn't make this choice. I did."

Zane says she has a good relationship with her parents, but she didn't tell her mother about her writing career until she had three titles on the Essence best-seller list. It took her father a while to warm up to the idea of his daughter writing erotica, but he when he read "Nervous" — about a meek woman who channels her sexual aggressiveness into an alternate personality — "he thought it was brilliant," she says.

"She has a unique voice," Adero said. "She writes erotica for today's female audience. This is not yesterday's kind of romance writing. She writes in the African-American vernacular. She writes in a language of everyday people doing what we do."

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