

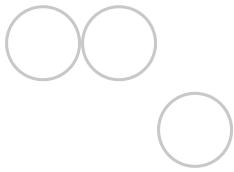
**In the harem**

# Woman opens up about journey from model to 'pleasure wife' to successful fashion designer

Jill Dodd was 21 when she began a relationship with international arms dealer who had 14 wives. She reveals the unbelievable twists and turns her life has taken in a new memoir and an interview with *Women in the World*

BY KARA CUTRUZZULA 09.15.17

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FASHION DESIGNER AND FORMER MODEL JILL DODD WHO HAS AUTHORED THE MEMOIR 'THE CURRENCY OF LOVE: A COURAGEOUS JOURNEY TO FINDING THE LOVE WITHIN' ABOUT HER ODYSSEY AS A FASHION MODEL AND TIME SPENT IN THE HAREM OF A BILLIONAIRE ARMS DEALER.

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He was a Saudi billionaire with a boat. No, a yacht. One so huge it would eventually be owned by Donald Trump.

She was a model living in Paris and navigating an impossible, sexist industry while battling memories of a traumatic childhood.

He had multiple wives. She was one of them.

That's how one chapter began for Jill Dodd, a model and fashion designer who at 21 became a "pleasure wife" in the harem of Adnan Khashoggi, an arms dealer and power player who was 44 at the time they met and in control of unimaginable wealth, that included 12 estates, a ranch in Kenya, lavish parties, and enough name recognition to eventually land him on the cover of TIME.

They met at a party in Monte Carlo, and she found in him the safety and comfort she lacked growing up in a dysfunctional and sexualized household near Los Angeles with pornography strewn around, sexual comments lobbed her way by her father, and groping between her parents at the dinner table.

Later she would learn how to stand up for herself. (And Khashoggi would go on to be involved in the Iran-contra scandal.)

Dodd chronicles her extraordinary life in her new memoir, *The Currency of Love: A Courageous Journey to Finding the Love Within*. She spent seven years writing the book, sifting through memories and turning them into scenes that volley from Paris to Las Vegas to Kenya, and details her early years, the gross misuse of power by modeling agents in Paris, including an encounter with Gerald Marie, head of her modeling agency in Paris who's been accused of assault by other models, and finding success in Paris Vogue, French Cosmopolitan, and other publications as a Wilhelmina model.

As she writes in her book of those tumultuous years in the '80s, "I have no idea how to care for myself or protect my own sanity and soul. I am doing drugs, reading palms, seeing a psychic and a hypnotherapist, studying five different religions at the same time, learning martial arts, studying French, modeling, attending fashion design school, going out dancing several nights a week, suffering with an eating disorder, and spending my weekends in the harem of one of the world's most powerful men. How could I possibly be confused?"

But about her time with Khashoggi, Dodd has no regrets, she says now. It's hard to explain to people, but their relationship was a respectful one, and she fell in love with him. He had told her upfront that he was allowed to have three legal wives and 11 pleasure wives, all of whom he provided for financially and traveled around with him if they chose. As one of his "pleasure wives," she could date other men, as long as they weren't from Saudi Arabia, and he urged her to marry someone young. Maybe a prince. Dodd didn't. She eventually left Khashoggi to continue her schooling and became a fashion designer, her goal before stumbling into modeling, and founded ROXY and other popular fashion and swimwear brands. Now 57, married with three children and living outside San Francisco, Dodd is an artist, painter, and sculptor and she wants to help other women share their stories without shame. In an interview with Women in the World correspondent Kara Cutruzzala, she shares hers.

### **Women in the World: How did the way you were raised mold your ideas of sex and sexuality and a woman's place in the world?**

**Jill Dodd:** I learned in researching the book that the definition of childhood sexual abuse includes touching and non-touching behaviors, that it can be environmental or things you're forced to see. I had assumed victims of sexual abuse were people who were raped or had incest forced on them, but it is also dependent on the environment you're forced to see growing up.

I was raised in a home that was a stew of pornography and had to witness heavy foreplay between my parents. Their relationship was based on chauvinism and machismo, and the woman was good for being beautiful and a sex object, and her intellect was not respected. She was looked at as stupid.

At the same time, we were expected to work really hard, so I gained a huge work ethic and we were very responsible and paid our bills. So I was a responsible person who got value from working really hard, yet I valued myself as a woman for being beautiful and being a sex object.

### **WITW: Do you think that mindset made you decide to go into modeling?**

**JD:** It's funny, I never thought that I would model. I wanted to be a fashion designer and I applied for a job as a fit model. I found out they would produce swimwear based on your measurements. I was also an assistant designer and gave my opinions on style and color and advertising. I looked at it as a technical skill, and I wasn't sexualized at all in that job.

Then I was on a photo shoot dressing the other models and the photographer fired one of the girls because she was too petite, and he said to me, "Why aren't you in a suit?" and I said, "I'm not a model." And he said, "Today you're a model."

That's how it started. I asked my boss if I could get paid the same as the other girls, which was \$800 for the day, and he said yes. I was only making \$4.25 an hour before as an assistant designer. So I got an agent and continued working at the swimwear company at the same time I was modeling.

**WITW: You say now when you headed to Paris to model at 21 you were very naive. Looking back while writing the book, were you surprised by what you remembered?**

**JD:** It could have been worse. There were people during the time who were being kidnapped and sold as sex slaves. I was very lucky that that didn't happen to me. But reading my journals would confirm that I wasn't just making these things up in my mind.

**WITW: Were you surprised by the expectations that were placed on models in Paris?**

**JD:** Yes, because in Los Angeles I had been sent to houses which were obviously pimp houses and been made to try on sleazy lingerie. I had to do very uncomfortable things while I was in Hollywood, but when I went to Paris there was a whole other level of women being sold as party favors. You were told to attend parties and if you didn't go, the agents weren't going to provide interviews for jobs.

**WITW: After defending yourself from an attack by a guy you met at a party, you told your agents you refused to appear at those kinds of parties anymore. How difficult was it to stand up for yourself back then?**

**JD:** I didn't know that writing a book would help me to understand myself better, but it has helped me connect the dots. There was a part of me that was a tomboy and tough and fearless because I was forced to waterski and ride dirt bikes where I was 5, and I was driving a speedboat and cliff diving when I was 11. But I didn't have the inner strength. I was kind of tough on the outside and had a bravado, but it was hiding this brokenness on the inside.

**WITW: When did you start to draw the connections between your childhood and your experiences in the modeling world and relationships with men?**

**JD:** It wasn't until I escaped my second abusive marriage and went deep into therapy for 13 years straight that I began to unpack where all of this came from. It was definitely based in childhood conditioning, and the idea that I should quiet my own voice and let others run my life, and that my voice didn't matter. I was re-victimizing myself because I didn't know how to stand up for myself. Even though I was a free, independent woman financially, I didn't know how to do that on the inside

in male-female relationships. I healed a lot during therapy and then was able to go on and have a healthy marriage, and we've been together 20 years.

**WITW: Do you look back at your time with Adnan and see yourself as a passive bystander or did you have any real agency in your relationship?**

**JD:** There were difficult pivotal moments where, when I look back, I wish I would have voiced my feelings instead of just staying silent and accepting what was happening. Our relationship was playful and most of the time it was pure fun, but there were times when I was hurt or when I should have said more or stood up for myself.

**WITW: You were also surrounded by so much wealth and excitement. Do you think that may have colored your perception of the situation?**

**JD:** I'm sure it must have impacted me at some level, because it was obvious that he had so much power. So I think there was an intimidation factor. I'm sure there was.

**WITW: Did you feel out of your depth?**

**JD:** Definitely. I was raised just right next to gang territory in southeast Los Angeles, so this was a completely different world.

**WITW: When you told people about what was happening in Paris — the parties, men passing models around, models being expected to sleep with photographers — how did they respond?**

**JD:** People felt afraid. This was back in the day when women were not protected. When women cried rape, the judges would say, "Well what were you wearing?" When people were sexually harassed at work, there was no system set up to protect us. Our voices were not heard. Then it was a powerful wealthy man's word against ours.

**WITW: You describe your interactions with the photographers and agents, and they were clearly taking advantage of you. Do you look at Adnan as having taken advantage of you, too?**

**JD:** It's funny, I don't. I think a lot of people think that our relationship is different from how I felt that it was. From my view at that age, I didn't see it as him taking advantage of me. I saw it as me willfully participating in a relationship with him, and I fell in love with him. Looking back, I see it differently now. And if one of my children were to get involved with a 44-year-old man like that, I would be livid.

But coming from the dysfunctional home that I came from, this was definitely a step up. I hadn't been raised in a traditional home where my parents had a loving, respectful relationship. I was raised watching a very sick relationship play out, and I felt much safer with Adnan than I did in my home. He respected me more than my parents in many ways, and the relationship that they had was far less respectful.

**WITW: You write that it took you years to be able to call the arrangement you were involved in a “harem.” Why?**

**JD:** I couldn't handle the shame that would come with owning that. I can now. Now I have no problem with it. I was in my late twenties before I could admit to myself that it was a harem.

**WITW: How do you feel when you see the stories about R. Kelly and the underage women he's allegedly keeping in his harem or “sex cult”?**

**JD:** I see the headlines and just imagine what it's like, and I think it's disgusting. But I also think, and this is just my opinion, but I would bet that the women who are getting involved with him come from backgrounds of sexual abuse. They probably feel like he's more respectful to them than what they've experienced. Think about girls that have been raised in the foster care system who've been bounced from house to house, and some of them have been sexually abused. Then at 18, they're not supported anymore by the state and they're homeless, and they wind up in prostitution. When you take a child like that and you offer them a home and food in exchange for sex and a safe home for them, it could be a step up from where they've come from. I've learned that the decisions that we make come from what we've seen before.

**WITW: Are people not paying enough attention to the women who are in these situations?**

**JD:** Exactly. Who are these girls and what caused them to make this decision? In my case, and it sounds crazy, but Adnan's harem was actually part of my path to freedom. He understood that I needed an education and I had started modeling so I could pay for my education, and so having him pay for my tuition was part of my path to financial freedom. And in us both searching spiritually together, that was part of another type of freedom, one of inner peace after being raised atheist. These girls are on a path and I hope and pray that these stops along the way are going to lead them to their own freedom.

**WITW: Were you concerned for your children to read about your history?**

**JD:** When you turn 50, you ask yourself, “What am I supposed to do in my life that I haven't completed?” And I knew it was writing the book. Even though my daughter was only 10 at the time, I decided not to worry about it until later. I was concerned about how she would react to knowing her mom was in a harem. But we've talked about everything with all the kids. My son is 32 and he knew the whole story. He's autistic and he's this intellectual walking thesaurus, so I would say, “What's another word for jealousy? What's another word for boundary?” And he would give me five words. My 22-year-old daughter has read the book. We have a level of respect and trust for each other. I'm probably more open than a lot of people. I've learned over time that by hiding these things it continues to allow the shame to control us. I've learned in the past four or five years how dangerous it is to keep secrets.

**WITW: Were there any reactions to the book that surprised you?**

**JD:** I used to hide the fact that I had been in a harem because there were certain boyfriends that made me feel ashamed and different reactions from people that made me feel ashamed. Then there was a

turning point in my late twenties where I decided I'd had it with keeping my past a secret, and if somebody doesn't like me and is going to judge me for the fact that I was in love with this man, then I can't have them in my life. It's been that way for more than 30 years.

**WITW: Do you call yourself a feminist?**

**JD:** I definitely own that title. I love other women, I've got two daughters, I've got a sister and incredible girlfriends, and from that standpoint I really love women. I think that women deserve equal treatment in every way, and I think by definition I am a feminist.

**WITW: Any regrets about being with Adnan?**

**JD:** No, because I think it was part of my journey and part of my education. I think it was part of me becoming who I am now. One of the most valuable lessons I learned from Adnan is that I learned at a very young age that money would never satisfy my heart. I was so driven as a young woman to be independent financially because I wanted to be free from the home I grew up in. And I thought that once I attained success then I would be happy. Then it became once I attained a certain level of fame, then I'll be happy. I learned that was not the case.

Living with Adnan and having him offer me all of his wealth over and over again and seeing how he and his family lived, I saw that no one was any happier than anybody else out in the world, and I certainly wasn't either. It was a huge lesson. I know not to strive endlessly over wealth.

**WITW: While you were writing the book, did you hear about where Adnan was living or what he was doing?**

**JD:** He actually died on my publication date. The exact day. I found out on the Internet. It popped up in my feed on social media. I was stunned and shocked, and in shock for about a week. I knew he was sick but I didn't know he was this sick.

**WITW: After your modeling career you went on to found ROXY and have success as a swimwear designer. Did that satisfy your artistic impulses?**

**JD:** I am a natural born fashion designer. I started to make clothes when I was 5 years old for my dolls. So it was fulfilling my own creative need to express myself and also a means of supporting myself. My designs were very bold and athletic and meant to be very empowering for women to own their bodies and feel free and strong and confident, in their own body, which is hard. I'm older now so it's a whole different game, but as a 57-year-old woman, I'm grateful that I'm so healthy and strong at my age. I don't care, I'm going to wear a bikini! I'm going to be comfortable.

**WITW: How can women become more confident in their own bodies?**

**JD:** The key is personal growth on the inside. It really has to come from respecting ourselves as women and respecting our intellect, our spirit, our gifts, our creativity, and our ability to mother and to teach. It comes from respecting ourselves for more than what we look like. We can feel comfortable in our bodies when we love who we are more than what we look like.

## **WITW: Has the modeling industry changed since your days in Paris?**

**JD:** There was recent article where a model screenshot a text from her agent asking to have sex with the photographer. Honestly, I don't really think that things have changed. There are still some fabulous people in the industry, but there are always those who are looking to prey upon beautiful women. They go after the weak ones or immigrants who are trying to support their families back home or maybe don't speak English or are in one of those group homes with 30 women living in bunk beds in trashy garbage-filled conditions. I think it still happens.

## **WITW: It must have been a huge catharsis to publish the book after seven years. What are you working on now?**

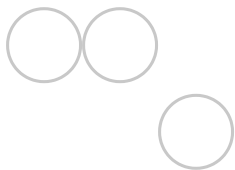
**JD:** I'm figuring out how to use it as a tool to help other women. I've been hearing from a lot of women around the country who have never talked to anyone about the things that have happened to them until now. Other women will talk about when they were raped or a friend who has gone through the same thing.

I want to encourage people to listen to their voice, to respect their voice, respect their values, and to know that we're resilient and to not give up on your dreams or your passions or your creativity. In order to learn to really respect myself as a woman and listen to my own voice, I needed to begin the healing process. Thus, the 13 years of therapy which was done while I was a single parent, barely able to pay my rent — healing was my priority! Then I needed to learn to set personal boundaries as mine had been trampled over throughout my childhood. A great tool for me was *Al Anon*. It's only \$1 per session and priceless if you're lucky enough to find the right group for you. Also, the unconditional love from my children, husband, and friends has been healing and a constant support for me throughout the years.

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

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