

New Book Features Reformed Media ‘Vulture’ Chicago Journalist’s Debut Novel Follows Reporter to Kenya

(CHICAGO: May 2014) Former Chicago Sun-Times columnist Debra Pickett paid her newsroom dues on the “tragedy beat,” interviewing grieving people whose loved ones had just been killed in headline-making fires and crimes. From this work, and the extensive reporting she did later in her career from sub-Saharan Africa, the epicenter of the AIDS pandemic, Pickett drew inspiration for her debut novel REPORTING LIVES.

Just released in e-book format from Keith Publications, the book follows local TV reporter Sara Simone as she chases a news story from Chicago to Nairobi, Kenya. Faced with the realities of life in Nairobi’s Mathare Valley slum, Sara finds herself, for the first time, unable to maintain her usual cool distance from tragedy. Her great talent, getting grieving relatives on camera, doing those wretched “how do you feel?” interviews, seems not just inadequate, but actually wrong.

Wrestling with complex issues of journalistic ethics and individual ambition, the novel offers readers a behind-the-scenes look at newsroom culture and a richly described tour of Kenya, as well as tale of self-discovery and personal reinvention. Writer Margo Howard called the book “the literary version of a carefully crafted Kente cloth, adding, “Nothing is predictable in this shrewdly plotted book about values, choices, Africa and America.”

“Sara is not an easy character to like,” says Pickett of her literary alter-ego, “especially at first. Because she’s so focused on achieving her professional goals, people see her as cold and intimidating. But she goes through an amazing transformation, one that I hope will inspire others. My own work in East Africa was life-changing in that it helped me find reasons for hope and optimism in even the

toughest of circumstances; almost nothing seems insurmountable to me anymore.”

Indeed, at age 40, Pickett has already reinvented herself a number of times. She began her career as a management consultant and, after chronicling the ups and downs of her hard-charging, frequent-flying life in a nationally-recognized series of magazine articles, she made the switch to full-time work as a journalist in October, 2000. She wrote for the Chicago Sun-Times’ coveted Page 2 column, launched the paper’s first blog and contributed to television news coverage at CNN, WBBM and WTTW. She left the paper in 2007, shortly after the birth of her first child and a much-publicized flap over an assignment in which she was asked to publicly breastfeed her newborn son. The years that followed brought the birth of two more children, the decision to leave journalism and change careers, the writing of this book and the discovery of a passion for running, which fueled the loss of 50 pounds of baby weight and a new devotion to health and fitness. Now managing a media consulting firm, Debra is also working on her second novel. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband and children.

Contact:
Debra Pickett, Page 2 Communications
773 368 7064
deb@page2comm.com

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Reporting Lives - PRESS KIT

Synopsis

Television journalist Sara Simone has just landed a huge story, the one she's sure will propel her from her local news job in Chicago straight to a network anchor chair. But, when her reporting takes her to the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, she finds herself unable to maintain her usual cool distance from tragedy. Her great talent, getting grieving relatives on camera, doing those wretched "how do you feel?" interviews, seems not just inadequate, but actually wrong.



Author

Debra Pickett began her career as a management consultant and, after chronicling the ups and downs of her hard-charging, frequent-flying life in a nationally-recognized series of magazine articles, she made the switch to full-time work as a journalist in October, 2000. She wrote for the Chicago Sun-Times' coveted Page 2 column, launched the paper's first blog and contributed to television news coverage at CNN, WBBM and WTTW.

Her debut novel, REPORTING LIVES, was published by Keith Publications in May 2014. She is currently working on her second book. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband, Roy, and three sons.

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