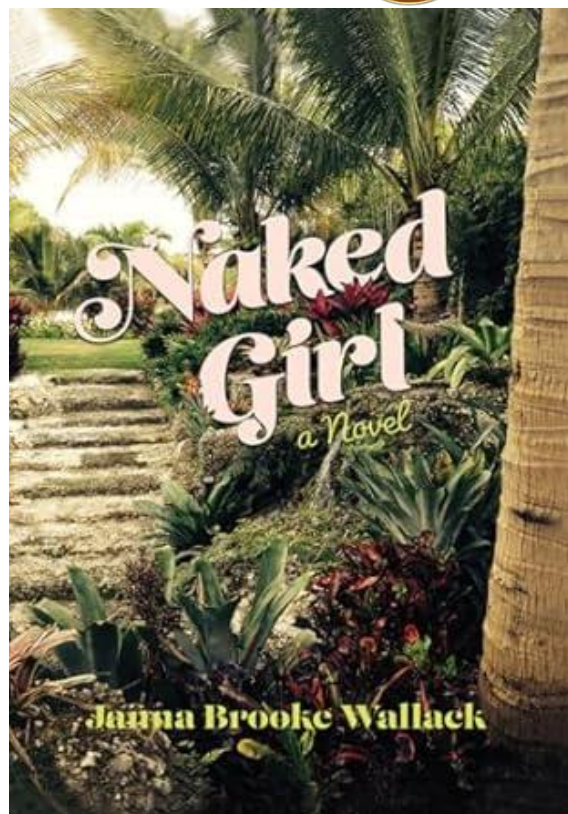


Award-Winning Writer's Debut Literary Novel Spotlights A Truly Dysfunctional 1980's Miami Beach Family In A Volatile, Stirring Coming-Of-Age Story



“In Wallack’s novel, a brother and sister survive a shocking upbringing of drugs, cults, and neglect...
“An endearing and fascinating perspective on a uniquely volatile and dangerous childhood.” —
Kirkus Reviews

“Wallack’s writing is evocative and lyrical, with a keen eye for detail and a deep empathy for her characters.... “The main appeal of Wallack’s novel will likely lie in its vivid character portrayals and its ability to evoke a strong emotional response from the reader ...

“For readers seeking a powerful and thought-provoking novel that combines rich character development with a gripping and emotional storyline, “Naked Girl” is an excellent choice. It is a remarkable debut that stays with the reader long after the final page and promises more great works from Wallack in the future. It is an unreservedly recommended Golden Quill read.” —
BookViralReviews

***Naked Girl* has been listed in the top 10 Best Sellers in three of Amazon's categories and has won several indie book awards including the: Indie B.R.A.G. Medallion, Silver CIPA EVVY Award, Book Viral's Golden Quill, and Reader's Favorite Five-Star Medal. Her short story writings have won numerous prizes, including a Pushcart nomination.**

“*Naked Girl* is a story of the enduring power of love in a family of lunatics,” says Janna Brooke Wallack of her debut novel, a poignant piece of literary fiction inspired by certain people, events, and flashbacks of her own 1980s childhood, where she was raised by two divorced parents in Miami Beach, who had very opposite lifestyles. Though not autobiographical it reads like a memoir. Her story is written from a place of knowing, and her visceral voice gives her story intrigue, resonance, and a rawness that readers say stays with them for a long time after reading.

Wallack writes with warmth, compassion and comic brilliance in *Naked Girl*, an enthralling debut novel brimming with the adventure, resilience, humor and heartbreak of growing up on the fringe of decency and longing for the unattainable comfort of home.

Wallack's enduring voice and fresh vision evoke the storytelling of masterful novelists like Ann Patchett, Kristin Hannah, and Zadie Smith. *Naked Girl* is a captivating and moving story that explores the struggles of fitting in and the power of hope, humor, and imperfect love. A profoundly moving exploration of dysfunction, the burning urgency to fit in *Naked Girl* takes readers on a deep dive into the odd and secret world of trying to survive an outlandish childhood.

Wallack is available in an interview to discuss the following:

- * How children seek to find their way despite how they were raised against the odds.
- * What it was like to live in a hippie commune.
- * How one teen girl desperately wants to be loved while craving a family life that illudes her.
- * How to protect against childhood trauma – and how our upbringing influences us.
- * The challenges of surviving a complex childhood.
- * How latch-key kids of Generation X lived with a wandering curiosity and street toughness.

Set in Miami Beach, Florida, in the awesome 1980's, siblings Sienna and Siddhartha rely on their unusually and uncomfortably close bond while encountering challenges by a parade of all-meaning strangers. As they strive to come of age on the fringe of their father's utopian cult, their scars run deep and jagged, and their attempts to gain normality, acceptance, and some semblance of peace culminate in near fatal explosions.

Naked Girl brings to life the family Jones, a father and two siblings who take up residence in a sprawling, but condemned, Mediterranean mansion, where, neglected by their father, the siblings navigate homeschooling, hunger, orgies, Christmas versus Hanukkah, the search for a new mother, gangsters, romance, and loss, as they seek, earnestly, and with love and humor, to define themselves and figure out how to live, despite grandparents and gurus, puberty and public humiliation, living off the land, and going on the lam...

Growing up motherless in 1980's Miami Beach, Sienna and her little brother Siddhartha get by with their charismatic and capricious father, Jackson Jones. When a small windfall relocates them to a condemned mansion on the water, the siblings are forbidden traditional schooling and left to live off the land. As Jackson uses their new home to create a communal cult while running drugs, the siblings are forced to raise themselves in a carefree, chaotic oasis. Living amidst the vagrant seekers who take up residence in Jackson's utopia, Sienna and Siddhartha strive to protect their unconventional family.

Wallack writes with warmth, compassion and comic brilliance in *Naked Girl*, an enthralling novel brimming with the adventure, resilience, humor and heartbreak of growing up on the fringe of decency and longing for the unattainable comfort of home.

Media Contact: Brian Feinblum 914-462-2038 brianfeinblum@gmail.com

Janna Brooke Wallack

Biography



Janna Brooke Wallack's debut novel, *Naked Girl*, has been named a semifinalist for the 2024 Publishers Weekly BookLife Prize in fiction. She also received recognition from: Book Viral's Golden Quill, Book Reader's Association Group's BRAG Medallion, and the silver medal from the Colorado Independent Publishers Association EVVY Award for Literary/Contemporary Fiction. Most recently, *Naked Girl* was named a Finalist for the Eric Hoffer First Horizons Award.

Her stories have been published or short listed by literary publications such as Hobart, Upstreet, Glimmer Train Press, American Literary Review, and many more. Her short story "Campaigning" was a finalist for the Lascaux Prize in Short Fiction. This novel's prologue "Five Pictures" was a finalist for Glimmer Train Press's Short Story Award for New Writers, and her story "Cat and Rose" received a Pushcart nomination by The MacGuffin.

In addition to her writing career, she's worked as a grant writer, a substance abuse prevention counselor, an editor, a playwright, director, producer, set designer, and actress. After spending a couple of years in Hong Kong, she moved to Hoboken, NJ. She raised five children and moved to Stone Ridge in the Catskills of New York, where she lived on a permaculture gentleman's farm.

Links to some of her earlier writings include these:

Typishly <https://typishly.com/2019/03/28/the-mighty-quinn-and-bobby/>

Penman Review <https://penmenreview.com/sugar-puffs/>

Blue Lake Review <https://bluelakereview.weebly.com/five-pictures.html>

She received her BA in Education from University of Florida, 1996, and her MA in Applied Psychology from New York University, 1999.

She grew up in Miami Beach in the 1970's and 80's, a landscape and childhood that inspired her debut novel. She now resides in New York's Hudson River Valley. Wallack can be found on Instagram [@jannakowan](#) and Facebook [Janna Wallack-Cohen Kowan](#) and Tiktok [@storiesbyjanna](#) more information, please consult: www.jannabrookewallack.com.

Janna Brooke Wallack

Q & A

Naked Girl



1. **Janna, what is your award-winning book, *Naked Girl*, about?** *Naked Girl* is the story of Sienna and Siddhartha Jones, two siblings in 1980's Miami Beach, Florida, who are coming of age in the shadow of their father's utopian love cult. Their father is a collector of wayward young adults who worship him and come to live with him and the two children in a broken-down mansion with trees and vines growing through the windows and cracked walls. The book is about how their neglectful parenting and extremely unconventional living situation affects them and the course of their lives.
2. **How did you come up with the title?** Originally, the book had a different title, *The Family Jones*. I liked that title, because there are some drugs in the book and I liked the double meaning: jonesing to get high, jonesing for a functional family, and then the literal surname of the family is Jones. Ultimately, I chose *Naked Girl*, because, primarily, the story is about Sienna. She is emotionally laid bare by the events and her emotional journey in growing up is the heart of the story. It is a family story, yes, but primarily, it is Sienna's story.
3. **What inspired you to pen this story?** Main reason: my stay-at-home mother existential dilemma kicked in. I was home day and night with two babies 16 months apart in age, and I wanted to be home with them. I adored being an at-home mom, but there was so much repetition, such a routine, soooo many episodes of the Backyardigans and Dora the Explorer, baby music class, alphabet songs...I needed something adult and creative to hedge my preschool brain death. My ex-husband travelled a lot for his job, so from Monday to Friday it

was all me. I got a babysitter to help and started writing. After a bunch of short stories, I found my way to this one.

4. **Your story elements, to a certain degree, are autobiographical, correct? Are you concerned about how others may view you after reading your book?** This is also quite distressing to my dad—who is definitively NOT Jackson Jones—and has been a good sport about just what you are asking here. The story involves elements, places, and feelings from my childhood. I would say that a lot of the story draws heavily on my own *emotional* experience as a child, but it is not literally autobiographical. But I would add that the overt neglect the kids experience in my book is quite relatable to many of my Gen X contemporaries. There is a reason they call us Generation X. We are the latch key kids, we are the generation of children who were out in the neighborhood when the news began with, “It’s 10 pm, do you know where your children are?” Also, the story reads like a memoir, and so it feels true. My mother is very much alive, however, and my father is not a drug dealing cult leader!
5. **The back cover of your book describes your debut novel being about the adventure, resilience, humor, and heartbreak of growing up on the fringe of decency and longing for the unattainable comfort of home. Why is finding a home for the main character so challenging?** Sienna is an old soul. She charges herself with the role her mother did not want to or live long enough to fill. So, we have this wizened, 5 year old trying to be a mother to her little brother and even her father, and she has a vision for how life can be safe and happy, and as she grows, she puts all of her efforts toward this end, but she is a child, and though she tries with all her might, how much power over the world can a five to ten year old girl exert? Not much. It is more than challenging; it is nearly impossible for this child to manifest what she so clearly sees that they all need, when most of the forces who hold the reins are working directly against her.
6. **Like the lead character, Sienna, in your book, you grew up in Miami Beach during the 1980s. What are your reflections on those years and that place?** Miami Beach was a small town in the early eighties. It felt suburban and safe and small and navigable by bike or bus. If a kid had an overprotective, ever-present parent, that kid was almost shunned. The more common situation was to have some degree of too much freedom. We took carpools or buses or got rides everywhere. We populated parks and community centers, or we were out on bikes, just like the kids in that show “Stranger Things.” I knew to wait for my mom or dad to be in a certain mood to ask them if someone could sleep over, and I knew, even at 10 years old that I needed to determine the logistics of the plan before asking...like to have in my back pocket that the friend could come home with me on the bus and then her mother could pick her up right from Sunday school the next day...no extra labor for my overworked parents. No easy excuse for them to refuse me. We had that kind of sophistication because we were always out with other children, in each other’s presence, dealing with all the good and the bad of it. My parents knew very little because we felt no need for their intervention. And at the same time, I once showed off and did a cartwheel in the middle of Alton Road to impress my friends, and when I got home, my mother said, “Please refrain from doing gymnastics in the middle of traffic from now on!” Someone saw me, called my mother, and ratted me out.
7. **In Naked Girl, two children are raised by a dad — no mother — who created a communal cult, leaving them to “raise themselves in a car-free, chaotic oasis.” What was**

that type of unconventional family like for these siblings? The family in the book leaves the siblings lonely and confused. They are not only living with their father, who is otherwise invested with his time and energy but also a revolving roster of strangers, cult members, who are coming and going. If you've ever studied any psychology, you will surely know that this can really mess up the ability to form healthy attachments in relationships. The kids constantly must wing it.

8. What challenges did you have to overcome in the writing, researching, creating, and editing of *Naked Girl*? Well, my Gen X and unconventional childhood was my research, but it did take about twelve years to finish it, during which I raised four kids, went through a divorce, remade my home and went back to work in a new career, remarried and gained a bonus son (making five kids), went through the pandemic, you name it! But for the whole process, I worked with only two editors, and I love them both and plan to use them both again with my second novel, which I pray does not take twelve years to write!

9. You grew up in a fascinating way. Please share what that was like. My parents split up when I was almost four and my little brother was two. By the time I was five, my mother remarried my stepfather, and we met and moved in with our new older sisters, then 7 and 10. A year later, we had my baby brother Kevin, and I became the middle child of five kids. During the weekdays, it was elementary school, Hebrew school, gymnastics lessons, riding bikes and playing with friends. My dad, who I think married my mom too young, became a seeker and followed gurus and went looking for his own meaning and truth, and so on the weekends, when we visited with him, we were swimming naked, eating health food, exploring. He moved around a bit, and we went along. It was anything goes when we were young, both wonderful and exciting, and sometimes dangerous, unreliable and challenging. I regret none of it, because it made me who I am.

10. There were nudists in your dad's hippie commune. Did that share your views on beauty, body positivity, or sex, at a young age? I think he only lived in the commune for a couple of years, but they were formative ones. I remember all the good and weird of it. I certainly played a few rounds of "I'll show you mine, you show me yours," with the children of this missionary family who lived there for a bit. Also, the women looked very different than I, and I did see them naked, and that made me feel like I didn't look the right way. I felt body insecurity from a very, very young age, maybe four or five. But also, it opened the unconventional world to me. I got to peak outside the mainstream. In my parents' home, there was a statue of Ronald Reagan, and at my dad's, I was taken to march on the White House against nuclear proliferation. Again, I am grateful for my experiences.

11. In writing a chaotic coming-of-age story, what do you hope readers will leave feeling? I don't really have expectations for the reader's experience. I think the novel will fall on different ages and types of folks very differently. From reviews, some people find the novel heartwarming and very funny, and others find it heart breaking and even disturbing. I would say it is emotional, that is for sure. I leave it to the inner child of each reader. Gen X readers will relate to a lot of the period references and enjoy the ride through the eighties.

12. What's the key to a writer developing believable and interesting characters? The writer needs to know her characters! They must have a past, present, and future. If they can't

eat dairy, the writer must know the cause and effect. If they are afraid of bees, if they don't trust strangers, if they get dizzy on roller coasters. Why do they exist? What do they sound like when they are excited or afraid? What are their tells? All these things must be known. When you write about characters you really know, then you know what they will think and how they will express themselves. This makes them life-like. I do not like reading books with two-dimensional characters.

13. You have a Master's in Applied Psychology. Can you analyze how readers will feel after bathing in this work of literary fiction, a place where real life and creative art have merged? I would allude back to your earlier question and say, because the book reads like a memoir, many react by feeling sorry that I went through all of this. BUT I am just a decent writer. I did not go through all the things Sienna and Siddhartha go through in my book.

14. Your novel's prologue, Five Pictures, was a finalist for Glimmer Train Press's Short Story Award for New Writers, and your story, Cat and Rose, received a Pushcart nomination. How would you describe your writing style? I think my writing is layered and literary, but also relatable and contemporary. I hope there is something for everyone. But it is not what many refer to as "genre" It is a steak dinner with baked potato, salad, and dessert not a Happy Meal. Both have their virtues. One is not better than the other, but I would say if you prefer books that are light and fun, my book has moments like that, but it will get under your skin as well.

15. Sienna appears to be a strong-willed character. What is it that drives her? Sienna is hyper aware of her situation to the best of her ability at every age. At five or six years old, she understands that she has lost her mother and that her mother's absence in her and Siddhartha's lives makes them different, and in her mind damaged and incomplete. One of her main drives is the hunt for a new mother, a replacement for what has been lost for them. In addition, without a proper mother on the scene, and with their remaining parent being inconsistent at best, she is also driven to protect Siddhartha and take proper care of him, both physically and emotionally. These two drives are behind most everything she does until she arrives at puberty, and then other needs arise like independence, push back from her brother for his own independence, her wishes for friends and a boyfriend, etc. And all of this complexity is what makes the sibling relationship and how it goes from simple to far more complicated so fascinating.

16. Your family has owned a popular South Beach night club for decades. But you stayed out of it to be a home designer, house-flipper, and author. It's not your scene? My father and my brother Josh work together in the family business and many other family members have come and gone working for the business. Anyone who knows me knows that the party life and the night life are not my bag. My husband calls me, "Nerd Burglar" and "Narc." If I worked there for one week, I would need a vacation from the sensory overload. I live in the country in Upstate New York. Someone needs to have a birthday for me to stay up past 10. Also, I don't drink more than one glass of prosecco every two months or more. I'm just not a party girl! I'm somewhere in a hammock, reading.

17. You lived in Hong Kong for several years, starting a theatre company and writing for several publications. What did that experience teach you? Did it play a role in your

novel's writing? I think my years in Hong Kong had a huge effect on me, yes. First, I got to see America from the outside for an extended period. Different laws, money, and media as well. My ex-husband still travelled 4-5 days per week and I was very much on my own and had to again recreate a complete network and support system, and I made friends from all over the world. I also travelled extensively which really changed my world view. I feel like I became an adult while there. And beyond all of this, I became a mother there, which was the most profound change I have ever experienced in my lifetime. I think the distance from family played a role in my having the guts to consider writing about my life, which I later abandoned and switched to writing fiction.

18. Podcaster John Burton, host of Home From Here, praises your book as “a sociological examination of the institution of family,” and Kirkus Reviews noted it’s “an endearing and fascinating perspective on a uniquely volatile and dangerous childhood.” Are you surprised at the critical acclaim Naked Girl has been receiving? Well, considering that when it first went out on submission it was roundly, very lovingly, but roundly rejected, I should be surprised. But after spending a few years licking my wounds and soothing myself with the stories of authors I admire and their stories of rejection, I finally got it out into the world. So far, it has won or been short-listed for five indie awards and honors, and I am really delighted. Like everything else, publishing is a business and what gets bought goes on trend. But quality is quality, and I believe in my book.

19. What’s so beautiful about historical fiction, like Naked Girl? If a good book takes place in a different time, and you get lost in the story, it is like time travel! I, for one, obsess about the past. I want viewfinder goggles that will show me long gone places and technologies. And though there are many aspects of NOW that are better than THEN, for sure, I do miss our attention spans before cell phones and our towns and little shops and communities before the internet. The past holds so many lessons, and historical fiction is like hiding medicine in chocolate pudding. You get the sweetness of the story along with the harsh reality of the time gone by.

20. You have five children and a career. How do you also have time to write books? Ha! Well, I wrote one book in 23 years of being a mom, so the answer is I don’t! And yet, I just started the second one...I guess the real question here is, “What possesses me to write books when there is so much else taking up my time?” And the answer to that question is that a creative needs to create to make sense of the world. I am one kind of artist. But to me this is the question we ask all artists and creatives: why create? Especially when the money is lousy?! Because, hey, the money is lousy! My mind works through life’s confusion and hardship via story telling. I write because writing is how I analyze, synthesize and understand the way I feel about my life and my experience of the world. For example, writing *Naked Girl* not only helped me untie the fishing knot of my own childhood emotional confusion, but it helped me understand my own parents and grandparent and their motivations and pressures during the time in which I grew up, and unintended effect: writing the book helped me remember the complexity and awareness of children and all ages and so I feel I was a different, if not better parent to my own children for having delved so deeply into so many ages of Sienna and Siddhartha’s minds.

Additional Book Reviews

"Naked Girl by Janna Wallack is a tremendously funny book that I found myself crying into... a lose-track-of-time fictional memoir, it is a sociological examination of the institution of family...Sienna (the protagonist) is written so purely you have to remind yourself you don't know her in real life...This is a treasure of a book that speaks to everyone...Must read."

- John Burton, Host of *Home From Here* Podcast

"A lyrical and unflinching dive into a radical childhood, *Naked Girl* by Janna Brooke Wallack is an emotive novel about the meaning of home when it is fleeting and ephemeral.... Wallack's prose is alive with the open-eyed curiosity of youth. Navigating clashes of belief and morality, as well as the storms of sex, fidelity, religion, and "traditional" family structures, this revelatory novel is a poignant exploration of the stress and liberation of growing older in a world that never seems to grow up."

—Self-Publishing Review

"The rugged elegance of Wallack's writing is everywhere, in which first-person accounts are both caustic and laden with style. I am reminded of Nell Zink's *Nicotine* in the chaotic nature of those who transit through the lives of Sienna and Siddhi, but with a panache that is singularly Wallack's. Very highly recommended."

—Readers' Favorite

"We're calling it. THIS is the book of the summer. A chaotic coming-of-age story with characters you won't be able to stop thinking about. A novel to sink your teeth into. Brava!"

--Jennifer Sandiago and Jenny Leifer Fox, *Valley Girls* Podcast NY/ *Literary Hudson Valley*

Amazon Reviewer [5.0 out of 5 stars](#) [Sensational Novel](#)

From start to finish, this reader experienced a true sense of presence; being fully immersed into the world of Sienna & Siddhartha. Janna's ability to translate, communicate, entice & capture... utilizing her magical mind, she shares & reminds us, life truly is a work of art designed by the one who lives it! Beginning, through the lens of a child, she stitches the years together for the reader with seams of mesmerizing brilliance & suspense. Connected & consistent, *Naked Girl* rips into every available emotion! Innocent & bold...survival at its finest...a must read!

Amazon Reviewer [5.0 out of 5 stars](#) [Naked Girl](#)

"When I saw the title, I was immediately intrigued. I'm a nudist, and I've been a nude art model for 40 years.... The setting was reminiscent of a book I read several years ago called *Swamplandia* by Karen Russell which had only been a three-star book for me despite it being a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction finalist (in a year in which no actual prize had been awarded). *Naked Girl* was about two kids who had to raise themselves while living in the shadow of their father's illegal activities after the death of their mother. Something about the story struck a chord with me, especially the last scene which had so many parallels with my own life. I don't want to give any spoilers, but I identified with everything Sienna feels during those final few pages.