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**Special Report**

# The revival of Donna Rice



Photo by Roger Richards/The Washington Times

Donna Rice Hughes has spent years shedding the Bimini-bimbo image that she says left her unemployable.

By Frank J. Murray  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Donna Rice's tortured odyssey from Gary Hart's lap in Bimini 10 years ago to respect and fame as a smut-buster is finally complete, she says.

At age 39, Donna Rice Hughes has become a Washington personage in her own right, on A-lists for invitations and enjoying far more status in the nation's capital than her onetime flame who twice sought the presidency.

"There's probably not many people in America who realize I only had two dates with him," she said in a revealing and wide-ranging interview at the Fairfax office of Enough Is Enough, the anti-obscenity lobby that employs her and that targets pornographers and sexual predators on the Internet.

The issue she now champions — fighting Internet obscenity — received a major boost just last week at a Washington summit on children and the Internet, featuring on-line industry giants like Amer-

## A long 10 years after Gary Hart, 'brilliant' ex-model fights on-line smut

ica Online and highlighted by an address from Vice President Al Gore. Mrs. Rice Hughes helped plan the event and was a panelist at a summit session on protecting children on line.

The leading lady of the 1987 melodrama that changed the rules of American political inquiry defended her actions and voiced lingering bitterness at Hart operatives who exposed her identity when the controversy broke.

"I wouldn't have dated a married man. I didn't even know it when we went to Bimini. But I was smitten by the time I found out he was married," she said, backing friends' claims that she was a political novice before the scandal erupted with a May 3 story in the

Miami Herald. She said she never heard of Lee Hart, Mr. Hart's wife, and didn't know the former Colorado senator stood atop the Democratic presidential polls at the time.

"I didn't know a donkey from an elephant," Mrs. Rice Hughes said. "My father told me who [Mr. Hart] was during a phone call — that he ran in 1984 and would again in 1988."

She's been married now for almost four years to Virginia businessman Jack Hughes. She agreed to a first blind date with her future husband only after confirming he had no political ambitions.

Even after the marriage, she defiantly keeps the name linking her to the notorious events of 1987.

"My mother didn't want me to do it — to keep Rice in my name — but I figured, how is anybody going to really see who I am and have this count for something good if I hide? I can't. I can't have that," Mrs. Rice Hughes said.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1997

The Washington Times

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## RICE

From page A1

Now when she is asked "Are you that Donna Rice?" she has her answer down pat: "I am, and God has changed me."

Change is an understatement. Her marriage has given her a stepdaughter in college and a teen-age stepson, even as she manages a full-time career sheltering children from an influence that frightens many parents.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill now court her for political support, not romance. It is she, not Mr. Hart, who gives speeches in the Senate Caucus Room.

When Sen. J. James Exon, Nebraska Democrat, was asked in 1995 how he liked working with Donna Rice on pornography issues, he looked a bit surprised and said, "I'm not working with Donna Rice, it's Donna Hughes."

"Yes, you are," said the lobbyist, who then explained the situation.

"Well, I don't care. She's brilliant," Mr. Exon replied, pleasantly surprised.

She marks her long plunge from grace from the day, she says, a college friend raped her in 1980 at age 22.

"I ended up losing my virginity to him against my will. We didn't know what date-rape was at the time," she said, explaining why she didn't report the attack. She counts her time with Mr. Hart as the culmination of a line of bad relationships she calls a lot of "little subtle left turns."

"At that point, after I was raped, I noticed I started gravitating toward some very dysfunctional unhealthy relationships with guys, which is not something I had experience with before. I had this wandering, curious, exploring spirit," she said.

"It probably didn't look much different than your average baby boomer pursuing a career as a single person in her 20s, but for me, not putting God first was a big deviation," Mrs. Rice Hughes added.

Among her choices were international arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi, Prince Albert of Monaco and singer Don Henley of the Eagles.

She first encountered Mr. Hart at a Denver New Year's party for Mr. Henley and saw him again in March — unexpectedly, she says — during a party at the Turnberry Isle resort near Miami. Mr. Hart was having a drink with a friend, lobbyist William Broadhurst, on the 83-foot yacht Monkey Business. Mr. Hart telephoned several times the next day, she said, and they had their first date at dinner alone that night, then cruised across the Gulf Stream.

Six weeks and many more phone calls from Mr. Hart later, she flew to Washington for a weekend rendezvous. A Miami Herald reporter followed on the same flight, and their secret love was not secret anymore.

The earliest news stories didn't identify the anonymous blonde Mrs. Rice Hughes now calls "the pretty girl in the case." That didn't last long, however, and she carries a major grudge against campaign officials who tossed her name onto the waters as press bait. They hoped Mr. Hart's presidential ambitions would survive his sexual appetites.

"I felt like chum tossed into shark-infested waters," she said. "Well, I got eaten alive. I basically lost everything I put my identity in, which is my reputation, my career, my achievements. Even when I was off the beaten path by my own standards, I still had had respect."

After Donna Rice's blistering "15 minutes of fame" at age 29, Mr. Hart quit the race and left her as a delicious distraction in the spotlight.

"His picture became smaller and smaller and mine became bigger and bigger on the cover of

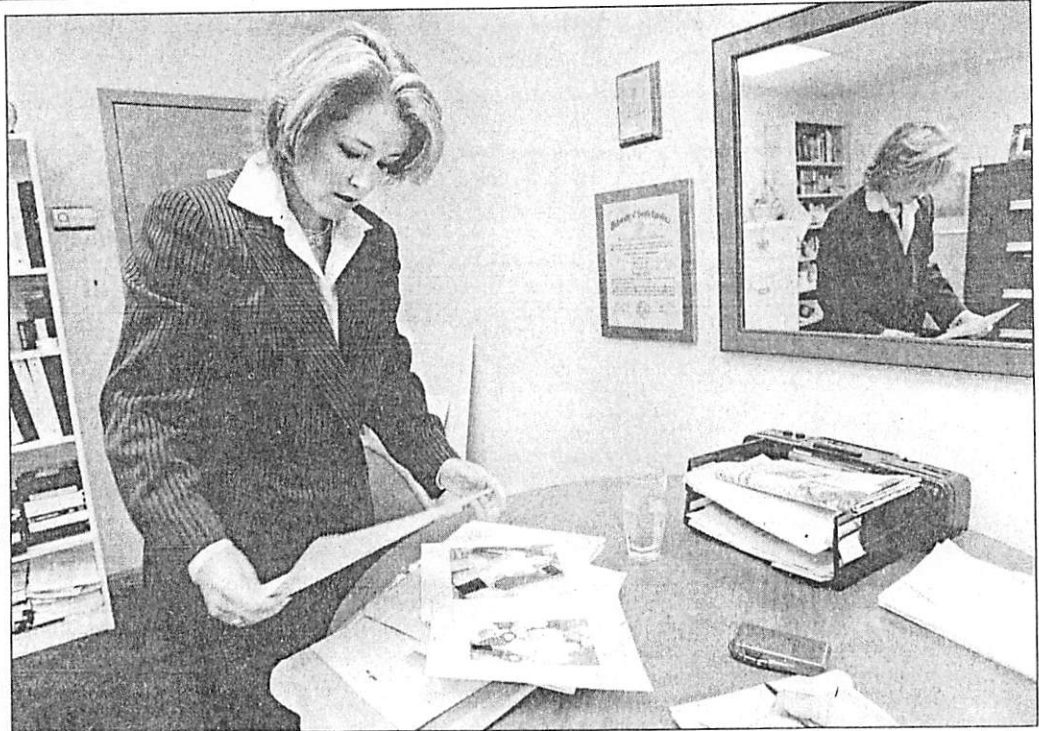


Photo by Roger Richards/The Washington Times

Donna Rice Hughes culls her files for examples of Internet pornography to show a visitor to her Fairfax office.

magazines," she said.

"Within a week we were moving into the bimbo headlines and the party-girl headlines. Then it eventually began to move into slut, prostitute, and a low-life little twit," she said, denying for the record that any of the pejoratives were accurate. She also said she never posed nude or was involved with any of the pornography organizations she now battles at Enough Is Enough.

"No. Absolutely not. If I had, the photos would be public by now," she said. "I did do a private photograph once with half a breast exposed, like you would find in any fashion magazine now. It was later sold — without her knowledge — to Playboy magazine for \$250,000.

It took years to shed the Bimini-bimbo image that she says left her unemployable in corporate America, except for one five-figure deal as a model for a No Excuses jeans commercial. She wants to keep it that way and granted The Washington Times an interview about her climb back on the sole condition that none of the early bathing suit photos or what she calls "the lap shot" be used to illustrate it.

"Over those years I decided to go underground. I decided not to exploit my notoriety. I decided to walk through the fire," she said. "My life hit rock-bottom in the middle of an international scandal. But I didn't get from there to here overnight. I've passed up all the millions of dollars. I could have bought my own Bimini."

The "there" she referred to is her Baptist upbringing. She was "born again" publicly in the fifth grade, was an excellent student who was in the National Honor Society at Irmo, S.C., High School and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in her third year as a pre-med major at the University of South Carolina. At the university, she was second in her class as a biology major but also headed the cheerleader squad and worked her way through school as a certified emergency medical technician for an ambulance company.

"In college I dated Christian guys only, and I'd been a summer missionary," she said.

Does she realize that that is not the way the world remembers Donna Rice?

"Yeah, I'm aware of it. Which made the pain of the way I was perceived and portrayed very hurtful. The bimbo thing was never true," she said. "It's an interesting phenomenon on the way women, particularly attractive women, are perceived."

She took a one-year sabbatical after college, then modeled and

## Enough Is Enough aims to thwart smut peddlers who target children

By Frank J. Murray  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The biggest communications problem at Enough Is Enough is explaining the unspeakable.

As marketing and communications manager for the Fairfax-based anti-obscenity group, Donna Rice Hughes uses obscene pictures to show just how offensive Internet pornography sites can be.

"Let me find my porn stash," Mrs. Rice Hughes joked as she pulled out a portfolio of pictures that are far different from the comparatively tame offerings of girlie magazines sold in plastic wrappers at convenience stores.

The photos are packaged in information kits with large red labels warning "Do Not Open" — as if the contents were radioactive. They can be shocking even to viewers who think they've seen it all.

"A lot of people didn't want to talk about this issue. They figured it didn't affect them. Now their kids can get it," she said.

"It's bestiality, women being tortured or urinated on. Most of us don't know or understand it. Your child can type in 'horses' on the Internet to do an innocent search and actually get to a picture of a woman having sex with a horse. That's not hypothetical. That's real," Mrs. Rice Hughes explained on one talk-show program.

Mrs. Rice Hughes tries to explain the distinctions between hard-core obscenity, which may be illegal even for adults, and legal, run-of-the-mill pornography. She maintains the public is so desensitized to sex she can use such descriptions freely even on television when she waves her red-labeled packets.

"If I just say pornography, I

know they're going to think it's airbrushed nudity and Playboy-type stuff," Mrs. Rice Hughes said.

The Supreme Court earlier this year overturned restrictions on Internet pornography in the federal Communications Decency Act, but Enough Is Enough sees the ruling as little more than a speed bump in its path. Last week, the organization saw its prime issue get major public exposure as it helped to organize a national summit on the topic of how to shield children from Internet pornography.

"They've taken away the safety net, if you will," Mrs. Rice Hughes observed, "and right now children have access to all of it. The other danger is pedophiles have direct access to kids. Never before has a pedophile been able to come right into the privacy of your own child's bedroom without you knowing about it and build a relationship with your kid."

She concedes she is inextricably linked in the public's mind to Enough Is Enough and hopes to educate people that she is only an employee and spokeswoman.

"There's a perception that I started this organization, that I founded it, that I'm the president," she said. "I didn't and I'm not. I didn't found it. I'm not the president." As the organization's communications and marketing director, her job focuses on raising both money and public interest in the subject.

"I will admit it's a much better perception than some of the other perceptions I've lived with," said the woman who survived the wrenching fallout from her brief 1987 relationship with presidential candidate Gary Hart.

acted a bit — small parts in "Dallas," "One Life to Live," a movie called "Last Plane Out," and the premiere episode of "Miami Vice." Her principal job was selling medicines and supplies to doctors and hospitals for Wyeth Laboratories, but she was forced to quit after the Hart affair.

Her intellect, education and striking looks gave her the option of deciding between show business and medicine, but for years after meeting Gary Hart she couldn't buy a job. She said corporate em-

ployers froze her out; a friend who intervened with employers to try to help was told: "Absolutely not. Too much controversy. Too much stigma."

She lay low in Northern Virginia for five years with a McLean family she still won't name. She was a companion to an ill woman who sometimes required a wheelchair, helping her with injections and intravenous procedures, according to a friend of both women. The friend said it sometimes wasn't clear who was providing Christian



## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The whereabouts of other key players in the drama over Gary Hart's 1987 relationship with Donna Rice:

**Gary Hart** — Since his 1993 foreign policy book, "The Good Fight," he has become something of a political footnote in Denver, where he lives and works. He dabbles in politics and international affairs and met recently with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and attended a demonstration for U.S. executives of a revolutionary Russian rocket engine. Colorado political observers say he toyed two years ago with another run for the Senate.



Gary Hart

**Lee Hart** — The wronged woman in the events of 1987 remains Mrs. Gary Hart, who still stands by her man. Their last big political outing came when President Clinton visited Denver in 1995. The Harts make their home in an exclusive foothills district, where stature is measured by the altitude of one's house lot.



Lee Hart

**Lynn Armandt** — Donna Rice's onetime buddy, until she sold the famous lap photo and story for \$75,000 to the National Enquirer, went to New York shortly after the scandal. The former bikini boutique owner operated a shoe store and did well enough to live in an upscale East Side neighborhood. In 1991, she sued Simon & Schuster Inc., charging she was defamed in a nonfiction book called "Blue Thunder" about the influence of gangs. Her last known phone number has been disconnected.



Lynn Armandt

**William Broadhurst** — He provided the "Monkey Yacht" for the March 1987 cruise to Bimini and lent the town house where Mr. Hart hosted Donna Rice that May. The former lobbyist left Washington for Louisiana after becoming something of an outcast on Capitol Hill after the Hart affair. He worked on former law partner Edwin Edwards' 1988 gubernatorial campaign. This year, his bank account was drained and he sold his house to pay his legal bills against a federal mail-fraud and conspiracy indictment. A first jury deadlocked in April, and he was acquitted in October at a retrial.

The Washington Times

charity and who received it.

"I just went through a recovery and maturation process, if you will," Mrs. Rice Hughes said.

Occasional sightings made news, though. In 1989, she felt the insults of Virginia Gold Cup arbiter Liz Washington, who refused to admit her to a reception at Members Hill. She was noticed in 1990 with a church group, donning a Santa cap at a party for poor kids.

The Bush White House balked in 1989 when Nina May of Renaissance Women, a conservative women's group, listed her to be cleared in with a briefing group.

"Is that *the* Donna Rice?" asked a caller from the public liaison office, Mrs. May recalled in an interview. Told it was, the caller said there would be trouble clearing her for admission.

"Has she killed someone? Is she an illegal alien?" Mrs. May responded.

"Well, it's Donna Rice and she will embarrass the president," Mrs. May was told.

"I was furious. I told the person that if Donna is denied entrance into this meeting, or even finds out she was questioned, it will be the president that will be embarrassed. I would see to that," she said. Mrs. Rice Hughes got in.

Mrs. May said she found Donna Rice brilliant, an opinion that others who met her quickly came to share. She was the matchmaker who eventually connected Mrs. Rice Hughes with Dee Jepsen, president of a then-obscure group called Enough Is Enough. At first, the idea shocked both women.

"Oh my gosh, oh my gosh. Wow. Oh, gee. . . That's interesting. Let me pray about it," Mrs. May recalls Mrs. Jepsen as saying when asked about hiring Donna Rice.

Mrs. Rice Hughes had much the same reaction.

"Pornography? This is a sexually stigmatized issue. And here I'm coming from all of this. It doesn't seem to be a good fit. I hid from the media. The last thing I wanted anything to do with was the media or politics," she recalled.

"But the more I learned about the issue, the more Dee learned about me, it seemed in fact it was a perfect fit," Mrs. Rice Hughes said.

Mrs. Jepsen's theory that pornography might have been the motivating force in the college sexual attack on Mrs. Rice Hughes decided the issue.

"That was the green light for me

to come on board," she said. It was 20 months and 500 press interviews later before anyone made a connection in print between the crusader against indecency in cyberspace and the Monkey Business episode.

"I always make the joke that they don't recognize me because I'm not in the red bathing suit," she said.

"By the time the media started saying, 'You're the same person. How did you get from there to here?' I was already very confident with the issues," she said. GQ is working on a story about her now, she says, but the most probing recent coverage has been in religious magazines.

Miami Herald political editor Tom Fiedler, who received the original phone tips and wrote that first story, found it classy that she didn't change her name when taking up the fight against illegal pornography.

"It gives her some legitimacy in there and frankly I admire the fact that she confronts that somewhat openly," Mr. Fiedler told The Times, suggesting that Americans love a story of redemption.

"She survived the celebrity mill and I accept the possibility that that ride came to an end because ultimately she felt that wasn't the real her, that her Christian born-again belief was a genuine one," he said.

Redemption was a two-way street for Mrs. May, who sees her radical insight into Mrs. Rice Hughes' talents vindicated.

"There's depth and substance there. As she's being redeemed, I'm sort of being redeemed, too," she said.

Even world-class pornographer Larry Flynt has kind words for Donna Rice Hughes, calling her "the most civil, nice person I've ever talked to who was anti-pornography" after they debated on a radio talk show.

She also is comfortable with her decision to refuse lucrative offers to sell her story.

"Am I supposed to ask here, 'Did you spend the night with him?'" an interviewer inquires during the interview.

"You're not supposed to ask me that. I've never answered that question. It's not been answered," she said, sliding over her own early denials and friend Lynn Armandt's claims to the contrary in an interview with People magazine.