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MONA LISA

A Life Discovered

Now available in paperback!

"Veteran journalist Dianne Hales shares with us the tumultuous lives of both Gherardini and the artist who immortalized her, and brings us along on the travels of a work of art for which love and esteem have increased markedly over the centuries."
— New York Post

"Combining history, whimsical biography, personal travelogue, and love letter to Italy, the book portrays Lisa Gherardini as a Renaissance Everywoman…an accessible, vivid examination of women's lives in Florence in the period….As Hales whisks around Italy, interviews historians, inspects Ghirlandaio's frescoes in the church of Santa Maria Novella, rents a villa in the Tuscan countryside and an apartment in Florence, and lunches with a Florentine princess, American readers will envy the lifestyle and enjoy the ride."
—Publishers Weekly

"[Hales's] Mona Lisa, like the painting itself, is clearly a labor of love."
—Chicago Tribune

"Lyrical…Hales paints a vivid history of the dramatic, often violent Renaissance Florence in which Gherardini lived…Throughout the book, she scours archives, interrogates scholars, and walks the streets of Florence, seeking traces of Gherardini in detail and in spirit. These first person accounts reveal the author's deep kinship with Gherardini, and her quest endows human subjectivity to one of art history's greatest icons."
—Booklist

"Engaging…Hales, an experienced journalist, weaves the stories of Lisa, her older husband Francesco and Leonardo into a rich tapestry of family life, mercantile society, politics and ar¬tistic development….Particularly enthralling are Hales' near-cinematic descriptions of Florence's lively social life."
—Bookpage

"Now, thanks to meticulous research, Hales' biography-memoir-history lesson brings to life Lisa Gherardini (1479-1542), the unforgettable face behind Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa."
—Fort Worth Star-Telegram

"A readable and affectionate my-search-for-story for art lovers and anyone interested in glorious and gory Florence in the 15th- to 16th centuries, and in the divine Leonardo in particular…Hales' assiduous research has made it possible for us to know Mona Lisa just a bit, enough to wonder if this otherwise ordinary Florentine housewife could ever have imagined her portrait enchanting millions for centuries."
—USAToday.com

Every year, some 9 million visitors to the Louvre make their way into a gallery in which one small portrait—the lone painting on an immense freestanding wall—sits inside a bulletproof glass case, and is further protected by the watchful eyes of 24-hour security guards. It is the most famous painting on earth and while it is unsigned, undated and unnamed, it is accepted as a masterful work by Leonardo da Vinci and known throughout the world as the Mona Lisa. In spite of its international fame, the life and times of the portrait's subject have largely remained a mystery —until now. In **MONA LISA: A Life Discovered,** now available in paperback (Simon & Schuster, August 2015, $16.00), award-winning author Dianne Hales finally reveals the woman behind the iconic smile.

DIANNE HALES

When new findings identified Leonardo's model as Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo, Hales was intrigued and set out to reconstruct Lisa's life, taking readers along for her journey through Italy, to archives and libraries, *piazze* and *palazzi*, abandoned chapels, and fairytale castles. Hales's Italian knighthood (granted for her previous book *La Bella Lingua*) gave her unfettered access to archives and experts, including Lisa's last living descendants. The result of her extensive research is an intriguing blend of biography, history, and memoir that takes readers beyond the frame of Leonardo's masterpiece and introduces them to who Lisa was and how she lived in the time of Florence's golden age.

Lisa Gherardini was a quintessential woman of her times, caught in a whirl of political upheavals, family dramas, and public scandals. Descended from ancient nobles, she gave birth to six children and died at age sixty-three. Her life spanned the most tumultuous chapters in the history of Florence, decades of war, rebellion, invasion, siege, and conquest—and of the greatest artistic outpouring the world has ever seen. Her story also creates an extraordinary tapestry of Renaissance Florence, including larger than life figures such as Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Machiavelli. Based on interviews with leading scholars, Hales recreates the world Lisa would have inhabited—from Florence's rambunctious street life to what she wore, ate, saw, heard, tasted, and experienced. Hales takes readers step by step to places where few tourists ever tread—the rancid lane where Lisa was born, the nondescript street where she spent most of her adult life, the tranquil courtyard of the convent where her sisters and oldest daughter lived, the urban eyesore her final resting place has become.

Hales also offers new insight into the life and works of Leonardo da Vinci, reporting on his boyhood as the illegitimate son of a prosperous legal professional, his physical beauty, the debate over his sexuality, his clashes with his rival Michelangelo, and the many times when his life changed almost in a minute. She also takes on the long-debated question of why this acclaimed genius chose Lisa, a woman without title, influence or prestige, as his subject. Leonardo would continue to rework the portrait until his death in 1519. From there, Hales traces the dramatic history of the painting Napoleon called "Madame Lisa," including the kings who cherished her, the poets who rhapsodized over her, the thief who stole her, the artists who mocked her, and the advertisers who exploited her.

"The real woman named Lisa Gherardini," Hales writes, "lived amid rapid change, political strife, meteoric creativity and economic booms and busts." In her remarkable exploration of the period, its morals and mores, its customs, its rituals and routines, Dianne Hales has brought substance to what had been a one-dimensional, painted-on-board superstar and has given her—for the first time—an accurate flesh and blood existence. **MONA LISA: A Life Discovered** is a beautifully drawn portrait of the woman behind the unforgettable face.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dianne Hales is an award-winning author who has served as a contributing editor for *Parade, Ladies Home Journal, Working Mother* and *American Health,* and has written for numerous national publications including *Glamour,* the *New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, the *Washington Post,* among other well-known publications. Her books include *La Bella Lingua, Just Like a Woman* and *Caring for the Mind*. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and daughter.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

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