

« I LOVED LUCY



LEE  
TANNEN

ST. MARTIN'S  
PRESS

Dear Lee,

I just finished reading *I Loved Lucy*. Bravo. Congratulations! I couldn't put it down. And I couldn't *wait* to tell you so. What a refreshing piece of entertainment and what a wonderful "look through the keyhole" at this very unique and complicated woman. I don't know how you were able to capture her so accurately. But what a great, fun, compassionate realization of who this legend *really* was, and a more perfect portrait of the "lost Lucy years" I cannot imagine being drawn... even by me. It had me in tears. Good tears.

I am very impressed. And I am extremely grateful to you for the graceful way you found to tell some very hard truths. It's time. I know you said you wrote it for you and yet it will help many, many people (including me) to know Lucy and understand her better, deeper. And, fear not, we will love her even more because, like us, she was only human.

People should read this.

Much love,  
Lucie Arnaz

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**San Francisco Chronicle**  
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Dear Lee Tannen,

What a beautiful job you did on your book, "I Loved Lucy." I picked it up Saturday and blazed through it over the weekend. When I got into bed Sunday night, about 35 pages left to read, I had such a great feeling: that tremendous pleasure we first learn as children, of having a really good story told to us. How I wish your book had been four times longer.

I think Lucie Arnaz's comments in the jacket blurb say it so well: that you found a "graceful way to tell some very hard truths." But there's also such a tremendous joy and sense of fun and love and respect. Lucy may have been cantankerous and shockingly blunt, but I don't think there's any way someone could read your book and not like her.

I was also lucky enough to have met Lucy. I'm a feature writer and movie critic at the San Francisco Chronicle. In 1985 I flew down to Los Angeles to interview Lucy -- in her home -- on the occasion of the "Stone Pillow" broadcast. So much of what you describe in your book corresponds with my memory of that amazing day.

I had stopped at the Safeway on Santa Monica Blvd. to buy flowers and brought a huge bouquet. An assistant opened the door, and Lucy walked into the foyer just seconds later. I was thrilled and nervous, and she could tell I was but she put me at ease with that warm, straightforward, no-bullshit manner of hers.

A publicist, a very old man whose name I forget, chaperoned the interview -- mostly so he could censor Lucy's more candid remarks. When she cast aspersions on the Beverly Hills Police Dept., he leaned toward me and said, "You're not going to put that in, are you?" Same thing when she said she'd come down with amoebic dysentery while shooting "Stone Pillow," and when she said that Desi Jr. was doing testimonials for some drug-rehab program "but at least he's not so boring about it now." A look of faintly weary exasperation, a hand on my sleeve and the same plea: "You're not going to put that in, are you?"

Lucy was amused by my name, in the same way that she was by your friend Fritz's name. "You're such a young kid to have such an old name," she kidded. "Lucy," I told her, "I'm 35." "Ohhhhh!" she said, as if 35 were prepubescent. Later, when Gary walked in, she said, "Gary, say hello to Old Ed Guthmann!"



# San Francisco Chronicle

a Hearst Newspaper

I complimented Gary on his performance in "Lenny," which made him grin. "Hey, waddaya think o' that?" Lucy crowed. "Is that a kick? Is that a kick!" Earlier, when I was asking about Elizabeth Patterson on "I Love Lucy" and then described a scene that she had played in a 1940 movie, "Remember the Night" with Barbara Stanwyck, Lucy looked impressed and said, "Boy, you're really a buff!!"

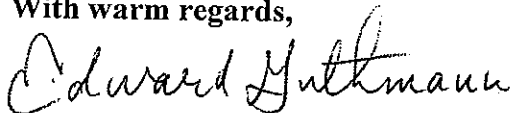
I've interviewed hundreds of celebrities but was never as excited or as proud. It remains my favorite memory from my career. (Gregory Peck is a close second.) It's hard to describe to people who haven't met her but it was so easy to hang out with her. Lucy and I struck up this terrific, instant rapport -- as if she were my indulgent aunt and I, for the two hours that we spent, was her favorite nephew. Very much the way you describe the rapport you had with her.

I've always regretted that that afternoon didn't segue into a friendship. At the end of the two hours I started to feel like I might be outlasting my welcome and I said, "I'm sure you've got things to do." She was happy to continue, though, and said, "Nobody's made a gesture that would indicate that." She obviously liked having company. It almost felt like she was ready to say, "Why don't you stay for dinner." (I was hoping!) In retrospect, I wish I'd said, "How about teaching me to play backgammon?"

So, by reading your book, I got to live that might-have-been friendship vicariously. Your book is very well-written and deliciously readable, but most of all I loved the heart that you put into it. You found such a perfect tone, and managed to be even-handed and loving and critical and insightful.

What a wonderful gift. Thank you so much.

With warm regards,



Edward Guthmann  
San Francisco Chronicle

P.S. My e-mail address is [eguthmann@sfchronicle.com](mailto:eguthmann@sfchronicle.com). Would love to meet you if you're ever in San Francisco.

# Los Angeles Times

SEPTEMBER 12, 2001



PHIL LOBEL

LOVING LUCY: Lee Tannen visits with Lucie Arnaz, daughter of Desi Arnaz and Tannen's friend Lucille Ball.

## He Loved Lucy

**L**ee Tannen's book on his friendship with comic legend Lucille Ball reveals a powerful and demanding woman who asked a lot from her friends but rewarded them with intense devotion.

"It sounds crazy, but I'm able to deal with just about anyone in the world, having known Lucille Ball," Tannen said over the phone. "She was so big and so iconic . . . Celebrity-wise everyone pales in comparison."

Tannen first met Ball shortly after the star married her producer, Gary Morton, in 1961. (Morton was Tannen's distant cousin.) "I remember trying to rehearse in the elevator how I was going to greet her," Tannen said. When the moment came, he was too overcome to speak.

He met her again about 18 years later, when Tannen was 30 and Ball was in her late 60s. He arrived at Ball's Beverly Hills home and she answered the door dressed completely in black and topped with

a shock of orange hair. She scolded him for bringing bad luck by using the front door. "She said, 'What . . . are you waiting for? Come in!'" Tannen recalled. "Never use the front door again! When you come back use the side door." Lucy loved to give orders.

Tannen's book "I Love Lucy: My Friendship With Lucille Ball" (Sr. Martin's Press) helps mark the 50th Anniversary of the CBS show "I Love Lucy." Tannen still chokes up when he recalls Ball's April 1989 death from a ruptured aorta. She called him the night before she died, but couldn't reach him. "I was supposed to call her hospital room and ask for Diane Belmont," Tannen said. "That was the code word."

The friendship had its ups and downs. "There was one time we didn't speak for a year and a half," he said. "You just didn't disagree with Lucy. It was kind of like her way or the highway. But she was incredibly loyal, giving and generous."



## BOOK FOR LUCY LOVERS



*Lucille Ball*  
- Photo by: AP

'AM I HAPPY? No, not yet ... I will be. I've been humiliated. That's not easy for a woman." So the great, incomparable Lucille Ball told TV Guide back in 1960. This was when the reigning queen of comedy was seeking a divorce from the love of her life, Desi Arnaz.

Lee Tannen was a mere boy of 9 years at this time, but he would soon embark on a friendship with Lucy that would last until her death in 1989. Now he has written a book entirely from his memories of this "sometimes difficult" star. When I picked up "I Loved Lucy," I felt inclined to dismiss it. Reading it, I realized Lee has given us the story of the untold Lucy years - what happened to this incredibly famous woman as she inevitably descended from the peak of her success and into an eccentric and sometimes lonely later life.

This book tells us so much more than anyone else about Lucille Ball. It has charm and sadness and funny anecdotes and a lot of perception. One of the most poignant things in the book is what Lucy said to Lee as they were traveling on a plane near the end of her days. He asked her how she related to her fame.

Lucy: "I once read an article that said I'm known in 99 percent of the households in America. And I'm looking down at all these lights and I'm thinking that if I rang any one of those doorbells, they would invite me in.

When I first came to New York in the late '20s nobody knew who I was, and nobody invited me in, and I had to save my nickels for tea. And now everybody wants to give me everything for nothing." Then she sighed and closed her eyes.

Read this St. Martin's book as a special treat to yourself if ever you loved Lucy.

# They had a Ball!

Star's close pal sheds new light on queen of comedy

By TRIPP WHETSELL

Is there anything we don't already know about Lucille Ball?

The adulation hasn't stopped in the 12 years since the comedian's death on April 26, 1989. Loving Lucy has become a cottage industry, with enough memorabilia, merchandise and books to make a landfill overflow.

Last Monday, "I Love Lucy" celebrated its 50th anniversary on television, and CBS will air a two-hour tribute to the classic sitcom Nov. 11.

But Lee Tannen, author of "I Love Lucy: My Friendship With Lucille Ball" (St. Martin's, 228 pages, \$25.95), Ball's closest confidante in New York during the last 10 years of her life, has written a poignant memoir that manages to shed new light on America's queen of comedy.

"Lucy was the most unforgettable character I ever met, and my memories are very private, so I was grappling with the idea of writing this book for a long time," says the 50-year-old Tannen, a Manhattan-based freelance writer and theatrical director.

"But when I channeled Lucy and asked her what she would have thought if she were around, I decided that she would have wanted to be perceived as a regular person, warts and all, and I think that is what this book does. Lucy didn't want to be known as an icon. She was never comfortable with that."



Lucille Ball (above, on the "I Love Lucy" set) was the "most unforgettable character," says friend Lee Tannen (below), who wrote a memoir about the star.

Tannen, a distant relative of Ball's second husband, the late comedian Gary Morton, knows better than just about anyone else. The two met in 1961 when he was 11 years old, and, despite a 40-year age difference, formed an on-again, off-again friendship that lasted more than 30 years.

After corresponding briefly during the 1970s, they were reunited in 1980 while she was in New York on a press tour for NBC. Over the next decade, Tannen became Ball's closest companion in New York, Beverly Hills, Palm Springs and Aspen, traveling with her, playing backgammon (they averaged 50 to 60 games a day) and sharing the most intimate details of her life.

"I was exploring new paths and goals in my life, and Lucy no longer had an empire to run. We were both very accepting of one another because I could be a good surrogate son and vice versa."

For the most part, Tannen waxes nostalgic about the highs and lows of their relationship, from a brief



N.Y. Post: Geiniger/Wisnord

estrangement in 1984 to the time they shared a rundown motel room in Fayetteville, N.C. (much like the place where the Ricardos and the Mertzes stayed on their road trip to California). In Fayetteville, Ball performed on an army base with Bob Hope in 1987.

"It was hysterical," he recalls. "We flew down

there on this little plane and there was Lucy, thanking the flight attendants for serving us this awful food and standing in the airport in her sable coat waiting for her eight pieces of monogrammed luggage."

Tannen chronicles their relationship in a lively, conversational style, which he cleverly describes as "episodes" in the titles that preface each of the book's nine chapters.

He also includes some great trivia that even the most seasoned Lucy buff might not know. Some of Ball's favorite foods were Jell-O with Kraft mayonnaise and a cherry on top, caviar and Spam. Her favorite TV shows were "Roseanne," "Jeopardy" and "The Price Is Right."

As telling as it is, however, the book doesn't contain any lascivious gossip. One of Tannen's biggest reasons for writing it, he explains, was to correct a lot of the Lucy myths.

"The other books on Lucy had a lot of mistakes, and I wanted to set the record straight about certain things," he says.

As for Tannen himself, who affectionately refers to Ball as his real-life Auntie Mame: "She was maddening and larger than life, and there isn't a day that goes by when I don't remember her with love. She was the most incredible woman I ever met. There's everyone else, and then there's Lucy."

# The Ball was in his court

Author recounts his days with television's comic queen

By Buddy Early

Lucille Ball's second husband's brother-in-law was Lee Tannen's second cousin.

That's how Tannen was able to meet Ball when he was 12 years old. Fortunately for both, they found each other again 18 years later and began a decade-long friendship that is almost unexplainable.

Almost.

*I Loved Lucy* is the account of Tannen's friendship with Ball, released more than 12 years after the legendary comedian's death, but still fresh with tall tales and minutiae of their times together. In the book, Tannen calls Ball a complex person — "With Lucy, nothing was ever simple." While both Ball and the book may seem simple, a closer look at both reveals layer upon layer.

It was 1980 when the adult Tannen was reintroduced to Ball. He says they immediately "clicked." Tannen had recently come out after an eight-year marriage and was enduring a tenuous relationship with his own parents.

"She was a surrogate mother," Tannen told *Echo*.

But the relationship proved far deeper than that of surrogate parent. Tannen says it was also the right time in Ball's life to meet Tannen, since she

wasn't working or having a close relationship with her children. From that moment in 1980 until Ball's death in 1989, Tannen and Ball were the closest of friends.

"I was not a sycophant ... I think she

**"Lucy was very, very smart ... not inherently funny, but funnier than she thought."**



Lee and Lucy share a laugh together.

had plenty of that," said Tannen of why Ball liked him so much.

Tannen liked Ball so much because of her "complete acceptance" of him and his lover.

He also compares her to such stars as Ethel Merman, Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe — those with underdog qualities who risk everything — and understands how the "Gay Icon" label reached her.

Over the years, Tannen and Ball played hundreds of backgammon games, her favorite pastime. (Like something out of a Woody Allen movie, Ball hired world-champion Israeli backgammon player Gaby Horowitz to teach her the secrets of the game.) Faced with the prospect of not working and spending her days and nights at her Beverly Hills home, Tannen said the

game challenged her like nothing else at the time.

"She never liked small talk," he said. "She always liked games ... (and) she had to have the best, be the best at everything."

For Lucy fans, perhaps the most revealing part of the book is that the comedian did-

n't consider herself to be all that funny. In fact, she often pointed to costar Vivian Vance as an example of comic talent.

"Lucy was very, very smart ... not inherently funny, but funnier than she thought," writes Tannen.

According to Tannen, Ball thought she simply "delivered the goods."

While he used to think she was nothing like her most famous alter-ego, Lucy Ricardo, he admits that writing this book made him realize how similar the two are. Nearly every episode that played out in their relationship could be paralleled with the adventures of Lucy, Ethel, Ricky and Fred.

The seventeen chapters, called episodes, are sprinkled with direct references or allusions to sticky situations, crackpot schemes or knee-slapping hilarity that was the essence of Lucy Ricardo.

"She could be clownlike and irresistible one minute, and maddening the next," said Tannen.

An example of her unpredictability was Ball's decision in the mid-80s to cut off contact with Tannen after a minor argument. The two didn't speak for over a year, and although Tannen accepts responsibility for the incident in the book, it is clear that Ball overreacted. Tannen says he learned to acquiesce to Ball's temperament.

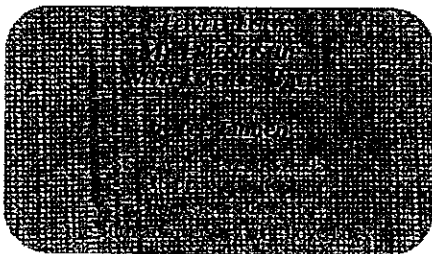
"It being Lucille Ball, you learned to do things on her terms," he said.

In the long run, the squabble would be insignificant, as Tannen would be by Ball's side as her health deteriorated. He had left Beverly Hills for New York a few weeks prior to Ball's death on April 26, 1989, and says he "never dreamed I wouldn't see her another time."

An interview with Rex Reed in April, 2000 spurred Tannen to go through the journals he had been keeping only in his head and begin work on *I Loved Lucy*. He says her spirit guided him in the process. ~E



Author Lee Tannen



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**Russ Lyon  
Realty Co.**

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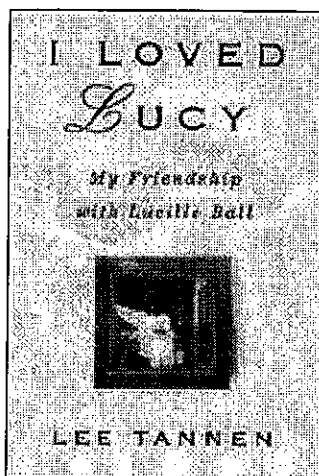


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## First Lady of Comedy

BY BILL BISS, Buzz Columnist

Lee Tannen had the unique opportunity to develop a long-lasting friendship with Lucille Ball. Their ten-year relationship is chronicled with humor and affection in his new book *I Loved Lucy*, just released Oct. 15.



As a distant relative to Gary Morton (Lucy's last husband), Lee was introduced to Lucy and became one of her close personal friends. This is his story of their time spent together and offers a rare glimpse of the superstar and the woman behind the famous person. His book is not a biography of Lucy, but details their many adventures that always seemed wrap around Lucy's fierce dedication to backgammon.

Lee lived in New York at the time of his friendship to Lucy and she would travel to visit him and his lover, Tom, and also have him out to stay at her various homes in Beverly Hills, Snowmass, Colorado and Palm Springs. Lee quotes Lucy in his book as saying, "Listen, I hope you boys learned how to play backgammon by now, and you better get your asses out of work because I'm bringing my board with me."

Many memories of the two together are spent over a backgammon board. As a gay man, Lee found Lucy totally accepting of him and his partner after meeting the star at home in 1980. What follows in the book are episodic chapters of their relationship and many wonderful insights and memories that Lee goes into first hand.

Despite the difference in their ages, the two developed a close bond which only cracked apart once during their time spent together. Lee felt taken advantage of by one of Lucy's friends and lost his temper with Lucy about it. The result: he didn't see Lucy for more than a year. The two did reconcile and no mention was made of the incident again. The strength of their friendship endured. There were many more good times to be had together before Lucy passed away in 1989.

One such hilarious incident was when they attended opening night of the 1983 Broadway production of *The Rink*, starring Liza Minnelli and Chita Rivera. The curtain was late and the buzz was that the curtain was being held for Michael Jackson. He had just recently escaped serious burns while filming a Pepsi commercial. When Lee whispered to Lucy what he thought the delay was, she quipped, "Jeeeesus, maybe he's on fire again." She had said it loudly enough and had the whole audience breaking up.

The book is filled with many such escapades as the two attended many special events together. Even a day spent just shopping and going to the movies became magical with Lucy's antics.

When traveling by plane together, Lee once asked Lucy how she relates to all her fame. She said, "I once read an article that said I'm known in 99 percent of the households in America. And I'm looking down at all these lights and I'm thinking that if I rang any one of those doorbells, they would invite me in. And when I first came to New York in the late 20s, nobody knew who I was, and nobody invited me in, and I had to save my nickels for tea. Now, everybody wants to give me everything for nothing."

*I Loved Lucy* offers many such recollections into the psyche of celebrity and one of the most powerful and talented stars in its circle ever to come around. Lee writes from the heart and the book shows many sides of Lucy far beyond the glow she created in her career in films and on television.

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