

# SLO LIFE

MAGAZINE



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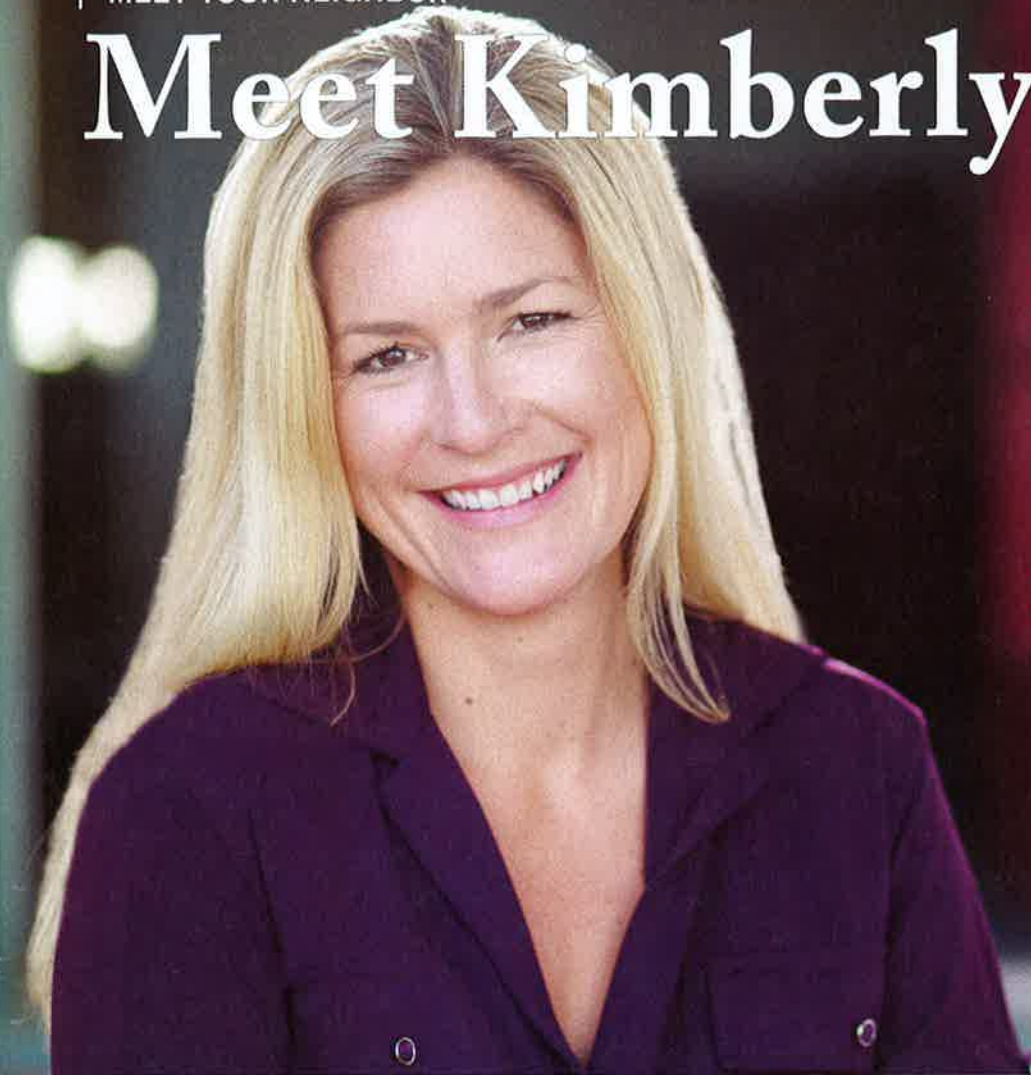
**MEET KIMBERLY WALKER**  
*Writing, White Teeth, and The Lunacy Club*

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# Meet Kimberly Walker



In this installment of our “Meet Your Neighbor” series, *SLO LIFE Magazine* sits down for a conversation with Kimberly Walker. She grew up in Southern California and moved to the Central Coast after graduating from college where she studied screenwriting. She then spent six months in East Africa where she wrote and directed a play designed to bring awareness to women’s rights there. Upon her return she bounced around at a few jobs before realizing that she needed to find work that would allow her to live in San Luis Obispo—that quest led her to create Wine Wipes, a product which discreetly removes red wine stains from teeth. After launching the company five years ago, she also started a restaurant in the old Granda Hotel, which she named Granda Bistro. And, today she, along with three other partners have formed the Lunacy Club to purchase and remodel the historic building on Morro Street which they expect will open next month as a 17-room luxury hotel in downtown San Luis Obispo. Here is her story...

## Tell us, where are you from, Kimberly?

I was born and raised in Southern California actually, a town called Upland which is near Claremont and Ontario. I grew up there, but moved up here after college. I went to an all girls Catholic high school. That was interesting. It was a pretty normal childhood. I didn’t get into too much trouble. I went to college to study screenwriting. I love writing, but it’s challenging because you are alone all the time. I don’t think people realize how challenging it is because everybody can write—I mean a majority of people can write—and so when you read a story you almost don’t appreciate how difficult it is to choose the words that end up telling the story in such a beautiful way that you are going to continue to read it and kind of lose yourself in it.

## Have you done much screenwriting?

Nothing substantial. I wrote a lot of stuff. I write a lot. I still write every day. The biggest thing I wrote was a play when I was in East Africa, Tanzania. I wrote a play called “Wanawake Jukwaani,” which translates to “women center stage” in Swahili. And, that was definitely the biggest writing that I ever did. I loved it, but I don’t think I’m cut out for the screenwriting business and the whole L.A., Hollywood lifestyle. I worked for a producer while I lived there and was going to school and I loved it, but... I don’t know. It’s just a hard industry to feel good about yourself. And, I don’t know, it was a challenge for me to be the person that I kind of wanted to be. It’s sort of hard to explain.

## Why East Africa?

I left L.A. and I wanted to go on an adventure. I wanted to figure out what my next move was. I had moved up to San Luis Obispo because my parents had a vacation home in Oceano. I thought I would stay up here

for a few months and finish this writing project that I was working on at the time and it just never happened. I just couldn’t get it finished. I didn’t feel passionate about it. I don’t know if you call it writer’s block or what, but I just knew that I needed to do something with my life and I wasn’t sure what that was. For some reason I chose Tanzania and I went there to teach AIDS awareness workshops. I went from village to village teaching these workshops on how to, you know, practice safe sex and how to say “No” and I realized that all of that was so far advanced from where the Tanzanians were at in their culture because women had no rights over their bodies. So, I thought the play was a sort of reflection of what I saw there. And I thought that if women and men were to come together on a stage in front of their whole community and be able to at least role play a different kind of conversation, a conversation where the woman was able to say “No” to men that it could potentially have some sort of an impact. And, like all volunteer work it probably had more of an impact on me than on them. [laughter] It was truly just such an amazing experience for me, but I don’t know if it really had much of an effect with the people there.

## Were you ever able to have that play performed in public?

Yep, on stage in Arusha [Tanzania]. There ended up being over 40 performers in the play because I worked with six different villages. So, each day of the week I would go to a different village and rehearse with the people that were in the play. And we did that over the course of about a month. We had the final performance in the middle of town in this area that was like a large outdoor pavilion. We passed out flyers and people came from all over. I wrote it in English, but the play was in Swahili so people were able to understand it. I had two translators that came with me everywhere when we were rehearsing the play and



*left* Walker's play translated to Swahili and performed in Arusha, Tanzania.

*right* Walker, second from right, and the staff of Granada Bistro in front of their converted ice cream truck that is used for food service at local events.



they would help me articulate what it was that I wanted to say. And they would change it themselves. It was really fun.

#### **Anything in particular stand out for you?**

The Maasai—you've probably seen them in photographs of East Africans, they have the big red scarves and swords—they're very photogenic. Anyway, they're also notorious for how they treat their women. They treat women so poorly that they are considered to be beneath cattle in their culture. But they are also wonderful people, they don't lie, they don't steal. They just have a different way of looking at women in their society. Women are the property of their husbands. Anyway, I told the Maasai in the play that they could go home and really put their own stamp on their part of the performance, their vignette. So, they come back the next week and, in their version of the story, all of the men are drinking and having a great time, and all the women die, and all the men live happily ever after. [laughter] And, so I'm watching them act this out and thinking, "Ohhhh my gosh, I really have my work cut out for me." They didn't even want women to participate; they wanted it to be all men. Some of the men even dressed up as the women so they didn't have to include them, but I said, "No, you have to include women." It was a really neat experience, it was really, really fun. I think everybody had a good time and it was definitely a highlight of my life. I was there for six months. I felt safe and secure the whole time. People are amazing wherever you go. I truly believe that. I don't know, I think there's good in everybody.

#### **What did you do when you returned to the Central Coast?**

I came back from that and ended up getting a job in radio sales because I wanted to stay here. And that was my first real job outside of film. It was scary going out every day and cold calling businesses. Ah, and radio sales, you know people joke around and say that radio advertising is the hardest thing in the world to sell. And it's true, it was hard. But, it taught me so much about sales and business and what it takes to actually make a company go. And that's putting yourself out there, and dealing with rejection and not giving up and continually going back to customers and really listening to what they are saying and figuring out how to make their business better. I think all of those skills are really valuable for any career.

“...if you follow your passion I think that's where you will find happiness.”

And, next?...

And, then I was a regional manager for a 1031 exchange company—I didn't even know what a 1031 exchange was when I applied for the job. So, I quickly crammed in as much knowledge as I could right before the interview and somehow they gave me the job. I found myself at these real estate offices giving seminars with like 20 or 30 real estate professionals and accountants and I'm teaching them about 1031 exchanges. And the entire time I'm thinking to myself, "Please, please don't raise your hand, please don't ask me a question. Most likely, I'm not going to know the answer because really I have no idea what I am talking about." [laughter] I quickly realized that was not where I wanted my focus to be and I realized I would have to come up with my own job if I wanted to stay in San Luis Obispo. The 1031 exchange wasn't me. I always look at life and think, "Okay, what is it that I want to be doing? What am I passionate about?" And if you follow your passion I think that's where you will find happiness. And basing careers on money or anything other than passion, I find for myself personally, that I'm usually not satisfied or happy. At the end of the day you're spending the majority of your life working, why not

make it something that you love? With Wine Wipes it all just sort of happened at the same time.

#### **What's the story behind Wine Wipes?**

I started Borracha almost five years ago with the idea of creating this product, Wine Wipes which removes red wine stains from your teeth. I came up with the concept while having dinner one night at Guiseppe's in Pismo. I always get that purple stain on my teeth after drinking red wine then I'd go into the bathroom and try to scrub it off. So, I decided to start looking for products out there that I could carry with me in my purse and I didn't find anything, and I thought, "Well, why don't I come up with my own product?" I spent about a year developing it, creating something that could be sold in the marketplace. You know, getting insurance, making sure the formula complied with regulations, all the things you need in order to have a product in the marketplace. I brought it to market in 2008 and have just been growing since then. We've had amazing publicity. Dr. Oz did a segment on Wine Wipes and basically said, "If you're not going to drink wine out of a straw then you should use Wine Wipes." And we've been on Rachael Ray, Good Day LA, The Today Show, even Jay Leno did a bit about Wine Wipes on the Tonight Show. We're an all-woman company. There are five of us in all: me, my mom, and three others.

#### **Okay, but what's up with the name "Borracha" and what does it have to do with Wine Wipes?**

In Spanish, there's a word "barracho" which means "intoxicated man." I was in Guatemala traveling—my mother's side of the family is Hispanic and I was trying to learn to speak Spanish—and had a bit to drink the night before and I was talking to my grandmother on the phone and I said, "I was a barracha last night." And she became so upset. She said, "Mija, there is no such thing as a barracha! Women do not get drunk." I had a conversation about it with her later and she said, "No, really, there is no such word as 'barracha'—women do not drink." You know, women do not get drunk. Our role is much different than that. Sure enough, I looked it up in a Spanish dictionary and there is no female version of the word "barracho" to be found. Sometimes when we go to events where there are some older Hispanic women like my mother or grandmother, they are very much offended that I even say the word "borracha" much less use it to name my company. But, we don't take ourselves too seriously around here.

#### **What's it like to have Dr. Oz and Jay Leno talking about your product?**

It's always shocking. I mean the Dr. Oz segment, I didn't even know about it. They called the office and requested ten samples because they had to put it through all this testing before he would put a product on his show. And that was the last thing I heard from them. Then, one day at the office, our online sales just spiked. I mean, our server nearly shut down. We had so many sales and it was going in this wave with people calling the office and saying, "I saw your product on Dr. Oz!" And, I thought maybe we were on for a second, but no, it was like a two minute segment where he actually had them there and was testing them and was using them and had a thorough conversation about them [you can view the Dr. Oz segment by going to this article online at [slolifemagazine.com](http://slolifemagazine.com)]. And I watched it from my computer just thinking, "Oh my gosh, that's Dr. Oz talking about Wine Wipes!" Our next focus is Ellen. We want Ellen to try our Wine Wipes on her show.

#### **Aside from trying to keep Ellen's teeth sparkly and white, what else is new?**

We just got back from a launch party, which we held at a restaurant in Manhattan. We invited magazine editors to come. And for three days out

PR company had set up appointments so we went to those and did what they call “desk-sides,” which is where we basically sit on the side of the desk and pitch the product to the editors. We’ll bring some wine and the product and actually do a demo. It’s pretty funny, especially for some of the appointments that are first thing in the morning. Asking an editor to drink some wine first thing in the morning is always interesting.

**What do you do for fun?**

Lately I haven’t had much time off because of Granada. The Granada Bistro was my little restaurant that was on Morro Street. I was renting space there for Borracha when the landlord said that he would be demolishing the building and building something new in a year and no one wanted to move in with just a year lease so he said, “Kimberly, why don’t you take it over and open up a wine bar or something?” He rented it to me cheap. And I thought it would be kind of fun. I thought it’s just a year so I’d get in and out. I had no idea that I would actually love it as much as I do. All of the equipment, everything in the Granada Bistro was purchased used. Really, with a one year lifespan, my goal was just to make my investment back during that time [laughter], so I had to buy everything on the cheap.

**That’s pretty gutsy to just dive into the restaurant business with no experience—how was it?**

I fell in love with it. It’s such a cool industry. It’s challenging, it’s humbling, but it’s a very intimate connection that you have with people. And it was such a small space that it was almost like having a dinner party every night. It was a really special little place. It was so small that you would end up talking to someone that you didn’t know, but it wasn’t a bar environment by any means. It was just a very comfortable space. Then the landlord got behind on his loan and lost the building to the bank and the bank was going to sell it to another party that was also planning to demolish the building. So four of us got together and formed the Lunacy Club, and purchased the building from the bank. And that’s what we’ve

been doing ever since. We’re now in the final stages of remodeling and are planning to open next month.

**What is the history of the building?**

It was originally a hotel when it was built. It was called Hotel Granada. It was built in the twenties and someone actually found an envelope from the original hotel so we have their original logo and it was next to the Elmo Theatre, which is now the Union Bank. And, I guess the Elmo Theatre was a Vaudeville theatre and the Hotel Granada was the hotel next to it. We haven’t been able to find a lot of information, although somebody told me that you could rent rooms by the hour there and that’s why you can’t find much information about it. [laughter] I had this vision that ‘Oh, it was next to Vaudeville, so there’s probably all these artists in there and it’s just like Paris in the twenties but it’s in San Luis Obispo’ and then... No, it was a brothel. [laughter]

**Did you imagine that this is what your life would be like when you were growing up?**



No, I wanted to be a writer. I’ve always wanted to be a writer. And I still miss that a little bit. I still write every day, it’s just that I write to myself. Just the act of writing, it just feels good. I guess it’s almost like therapy. But, sometimes I go back and read what I wrote and I think, “Ugh, I hope that when I die nobody reads this because they are going to say, ‘She was boring... why was she writing about the pasta that she made and why did she write about her cat again?’” [laughter] We have a blog for Barracha that all of us contribute to from time-to-time, but other than that, no. When I travel I like to write about my experience. But, usually I just write it for myself and don’t publish it. When you’re traveling and in another place it’s so easy to write because everything is so new and exciting and interesting. I like that kind of writing, about travel and adventure.

**Thanks so much, Kimberly, we’d love to continue our conversation but we know you have work to do.**


No, thank you—it’s been a pleasure visiting with you. **SLO LIFE**

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