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August 10, 2010

Personality Profile on Jennifer Ditmars

"It was a total hippie house," said Jennifer Ditmars recalling the home she lived in for one year with her husband Ken and their friends. Hand painted flames climbed the red walls of the kitchen while painted clouds adorned the blue living room. Instead of doors and curtains, the home was full of various tapestries and tarps. There was no heat -and no oven. A trip to the bathroom required the user to have the skill of an athlete to leap over the hole that invaded the floor.

Jen admitted that "on a whim" she left her high paying job in New Jersey in exchange for an \$8.00 an hour job at a wine shop in a southern ho-dunk town. "I've never been so poor in all my life," she said. As part of her training, she would bring home \$30 bottles of wine to drink while they boiled packages of Ramen Pride for dinner.

Friends became family and she surrounded herself with people of all calibers -from the "dirt-poor hippies" in town to the elite lawyers and even the mayor. She once attended a Halloween costume party at an old antebellum mansion owned by a world-traveling chef. "The things we were able to do were amazing, and then we'd go home and freeze our butts off because we had no heat," she said laughing. "It was the weirdest, neatest experience ever."

Raised in Aston, Pennsylvania, Jennifer is the oldest of three sisters. She married her high school sweetheart at 21 and became mom to her son, Aiden, a few years later.

Always having been intrigued by the paranormal, Jen laughs at the irony of her and her friend's birthdates. "I was born on 8-8-7-7 at 11:44," she said tapping her knuckles on the table in time with each number. "And my best friend in high school was born on 9-9-7-7 at 1:11. Isn't that weird?"

She picks up her glass of Pinot Grigio and tells the story of how she came to love both the supernatural and reading. Whenever there was a storm her mother would turn off all the lights filling the room with candlelight. Sporadic flashes of lightening would change the room from yellow to pink. In

between the rain and the thunder her mom's voice could be heard reading chilling tales by Edgar Allan Poe. "Tell Tale Heart" and "The Pit and the Pendulum" were among her mom's favorites.

Jen's favorite literary genre is paranormal romance. She and Ken just finished rereading the Sookie Stackhouse novels that the HBO series "True Blood" was taken from. "He was perpetually a book behind me," she said recalling their shared love for the series. She also loves the classics, with *Pride and Prejudice* being one of her favorites. "I'm an addict and I have it in probably about 85,000 different versions," she said. "Including *Pride and Prejudice* in zombies."

From a young age, Jen was concerned about the world around her. When she was a little girl she couldn't grasp the concept of poverty within the United States. Racism made her skin crawl. As she got older, she saw what her family members went through when they came home from war which helped solidify her opposition to it. "I've literally been a bleeding heart liberal since I was his age," she said nodding towards her 7 year old son. He darts out of sight with a gallon of Turkey Hill ice cream in his arms. "My mom never told me her political affiliation. It was always the issues we talked about."

Armed with the issues Jen would listen to the politicians on television to learn their views. Jen would guess who her mom voted for based on their talks and eventually her mom would tell her, but it wasn't until Jen had made up her mind on who *she* would have chosen.

At age 13, Jen got on a bus with a group and went to Washington, D.C. to walk in the Right for Life march. "Mom would drop me off, hand me my lunch and load me up. And she'd be there when the bus got back," she said. Each year she would march for whatever cause she believed in.

It was only natural that Jen would end up getting involved in politics as an adult. This past June, she was elected unanimously for the position of democratic committee woman for the sixth district in Mount Holly, NJ -where Jen currently resides.

The committee is currently unhappy with Jen's bluntness on how the township has been handling the situation in the Gardens district -a series of low-income row homes that were initially started as a

place to house military servicemen. "The garbage and crime that is being allowed to happen in this town is ungodly -and it's ignored. Most of it is centralized in the Gardens district," she said.

She explains how over the last twenty-five years landlords have bought large blocks of these homes and have failed to maintain acceptable living standards. "Our leaders in this town have allowed it to get to this point," she said referring to the township's lack of responsibility to ensure proper upkeep.

Eminent domain allows the government to confiscate these homes so they can level the area and start over. In exchange the government must give the residents fair market value for their homes. In this case, there is little market value and the residents left can't afford to live elsewhere. Jen believes the best thing to do is to give the people remaining a new condo, make the new development mixed affordability, and have the township take responsibility for the upkeep of this disregarded area.

Aside from politics, there is a high regard in the Ditmar house towards music. When Aiden was a baby, Jen would roll his stroller over to the kitchen door and the two would listen as her husband's band would practice in the garage. "Playing music, for Ken, is like breathing," she said. "He has to have it in his life." In fact, they all do. Though Ken specializes in congas, he has been teaching their son Aiden to play guitar. During their practice sessions, Jen enjoys singing along.

When she put herself through college, she indulged in an opera class where she learned to put power behind the voice that comes out of her tiny 4'11" frame. Ken is currently in the works of putting together an elite band with former band-mate, Chris Rusnak. When the auditions come up for lead singer, Jen will be standing in line. She knows that she will not get preferential treatment though. "The aim they are going for is not with a female vocalist," she said. "Unless I can show that I am really awesome."

Though Jen does enjoy singing while Aiden and Ken strum, her most anticipated moment with her son occurs every night before bed. After saying prayers the two "hang out and read together." Taking a break from the Harry Potter series, they are currently reading the Narnia books given to him for his birthday. "For me, it's my favorite thing we do together because he really gets into it," she said.

Much like researching candidates' issues, Jen kept an open mind as she researched the values behind various faiths. Catholicism won her devotion in the end and she adores what it stands for. Pope John Paul reminds Jen of her Pop-Pop in that "they both oozed love." "That's what I love about being Catholic," she said. "It's love centered in its truest form."

Jen spent a lot of time researching schools for Aiden, but ultimately chose a Quaker school over a Catholic one. While the quality of education proved to be superior, she was concerned with what they would be teaching him from a faith perspective. When she visited the school, showcased on the main wall were quotes from three very different leaders: prominent Quaker William Penn, Martin Luther King, and Pope John Paul. Any doubts she had disappeared and she now sends him there in confidence. The school emphasizes community and she feels that it goes hand in hand with Catholicism's second commandment, "love your neighbor".

When the topic of Aiden's school came up he was excited to brag about getting out earlier than other kids. They go back a week later too, Jen said while she doted on her son. "Earlier today he told me, "All you really need to live is music and food." I said, "That's it?" "And Gatorade." he told me." She smiled as she repeated her son's words of wisdom. Of course during playoffs he'd throw in baseball and hockey too, she added. "We're huge baseball and hockey fans." Aiden whispers something to his mom before taking off to his room.

Later this summer, they will be taking a family trip to Cooperstown, New York to see the baseball hall of fame. And a year after that, Jen will be traveling to Italy with her two sisters, Gina and Catherine, to meet relatives on the Abruzzi coast. Being only two hours from Rome, she can't pass up a chance for a Sunday morning mass with the pope at the Vatican.

She takes a sip of wine before sharing that Gina and Catherine are actually her half-sisters. Jen's mom Rita became intimate with her friend Steve Shaffer who wanted nothing to do with being a dad. The Christmas following Jen's birth, Steve's family pressured him to see Jen. Refusing to leave her daughter with the Shaffers, Rita insisted on attending the party. It was a good thing she did because Rita met

Steve's cousin Scott. The two hit it off, got married, had Gina and Catherine, and have been together ever since. It was only five years ago that Jen's youngest sister, Catherine found out. "The funny thing is, technically we're sisters and cousins," Jen said as she screamed in laughter. "Oh, it's so white trash it's great!"

Upon hearing the commotion, Aiden pushes the door open and announces that he is watching the Phillies game with his dad. "They're playing the Mets", he said. "It's one -one." Seeing this kid in his Phillies shirt staring at his mom with pleading eyes, there was nothing left to do but call it a night.