

Before Lara Croft, Before Indiana Jones

By Brantley Thompson Elkins

Here are a couple of advance raves at Amazon.com for a new book:

“A fascinating and engrossing study of a ground-breaking woman traveler and writer. The subject of this biography, Jane Dolinger, demonstrates that the mid-twentieth-century idea that the jungle was ‘no place for a girl’ was wrong. Abbott’s careful and sympathetic study places this amazing popular writer’s life in its historical and literary context. Recommended for women’s studies, popular culture, and travel studies scholars.”—Robin Roberts, Professor of English and Women’s and Gender Studies, Louisiana State University

“Like Amelia Earhart, Jackie Kennedy, and others, Jane Dolinger was an Alpha Woman who carved out a unique, grand life in inspirational style. To learn of her exploits and read her travel pieces, one wonders why she isn’t already among the top tier of the most admired women in history. Thankfully, Abbott’s lively, well-researched biography makes Jane’s lasting contribution to the travel genre abundantly clear.”—Tina Santi Flaherty, author of *What Jackie Taught Us: Lessons from the Remarkable Life of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis*

The book is Lawrence Abbott’s *Jane Dolinger: The Adventurous Life of an American Travel Writer*, which came out Aug. 31. Think of it: Dolinger is now considered a role model for women and even a fit subject for academic women’s studies. Women’s studies tend to frown on what scholars call the “male gaze,” and yet millions of men once gazed at her awesome body in semi-nude pictorials.

It must have been around 1960 that I first became aware of Jane Dolinger. She was one of a number of models featured in *Modern Man*, one of the leading skin magazines – and the only one I can remember from that magazine who wasn’t already – like June Wilkinson, for example – well known from other skin magazines.

She also wrote for men’s adventure magazines, but I never picked those up. In *Modern Man*, her photo layouts were often related to accounts of her adventures among Indians of South America or one of the few remaining harems in the Middle East. I wasn’t sure at the time whether this was for real or just a put-on, but she was one of my favorite fantasy squeezes. My favorite shot of her, I remember, was as a pirate, wearing a bandana and a knife belt and little else. She looked as if she could take care of herself – and take very good care of any man lucky enough to share her bed. She wasn’t a classic Hollywood-type beauty; she was more rough-hewn, but all the more enchanting for that. Here’s the only color shot I’ve been able to find online.



This was before *The Feminine Mystique*, before Women's Liberation. Feminists of later years, and even post-feminists of today, would have disdained Dolinger for her appearances in what was sometimes called "stroke magazines" for obvious reasons. Most of the models who appeared in them 40 years or more ago are long-forgotten, perhaps dead. Jane herself died Sept. 1, 1995. And yet she is not forgotten. Here is a tribute that was posted Oct. 24, 2003, by Kim du Toit:

Jane Dolinger

Who she?

Well, if you'd lived in the 1950s as a red-blooded male, you'd know.

Miss Dolinger was the real deal: an actual explorer of exotic lands, a writer of books and articles about her travels, and she appeared in various men's magazines (in the days when there were real men to read them). She was also the owner of a bodacious set of tatas, as can be [seen in her] totally gratuitous near-nude pics.

Clever, adventurous, gorgeous—what's not to like?

Kim's site has been closed since I quoted him in the first edition of this essay, but below is a link to one of Jane's own pieces:

<http://www.saviiodsilva.net/r/x/e/37.htm>

And here's a longer account of Dolinger from a site called Java's Bachelor Pad:

Sexy pin-up. World explorer. It's a wicked combination. Month after month for, Modern Man readers were treated to Jane Dolinger's globe-trotting accounts as well as a healthy dose of cheesecake posed in exotic locales. She was the all-American girl who faced danger and found adventure no matter where she landed. One month she would be Queen of the Amazon, the next she was in the middle of a Voodoo ceremony, and then it was off to a Moroccan harem. No matter where she was, she always looked great whether draped in leopard skins, wrapped in South American tapestries, or dressed as a Egyptian princess. Dolinger's stories were always a breathless, daring narrative of danger and intrigue throughout the uncivilized parts of the planet. When red-blooded men sat in their bachelor pads and day-dreamed of world exploring, they would always dream that it would be Dolinger they would bump into while en-route to Incan ruins or cutting their way through jungle vines. Men's magazines were always filled with rugged and sweaty accounts of exploration and danger found in the deep dark corners of the uncivilized world, but with Dolinger you added that dose of sexuality that was hard to find in the typical stories of that genre. Although it is easy to dismiss her magazine articles as a gimmick to lure readers eager to hear tales of the exotic, the truth is that Dolinger was the real deal. She was a popular adventure writer with numerous adventure books to her credit (such as The Forbidden World of the Jaguar Princess, The Jungle is a Woman, and Behind Harem Walls). The fact that she looked good in front of the camera only helped matters.

<http://www.javasbachelorpad.com/dolinger.html>



In short, Jane Dolinger was a real-life Lara Croft – before Lara Croft was invented, She was a female Indiana Jones before the Indiana Jones movies. I think a lot of men must have responded to that. Whether they knew it or not, they lusted for a woman who could be at home in what was then called a “man’s world,” who was as adventurous as a male hero – but in the body of a woman who inflamed their desire. She was a role model in an odd sense: women obviously weren’t reading men’s magazines, and if they ever came across them, they’d have considered her appearances crude exploitation. But she was nevertheless a role model for men’s libidos, challenging conventional ideas of what made a woman sexually appealing. Women in those days were supposed to be domestic and submissive – and helpless outside their traditional roles. In action-adventure stories or movies, they could only be damsels in distress. Men’s sexual fantasies rarely went beyond the bedroom, or perhaps the back seat of a convertible. But in fantasizing about Jane Dolinger, they could imagine sharing adventures by day and passion by night in exotic locales. What Jane’s horny fans at *Modern Man* didn’t know was that she already had a man to share the adventures and passion – Ken Krippene, adventurer and treasure hunter. Gail Howard, another woman adventurer, recalled crossing paths with them some time in the mid-60s in an account of her own adventures:

Jane had met Ken eight years before, when she answered his ad in a Miami newspaper for a Girl Friday to go to Peru. He was working on a script there. They lived with the Indians on the Ucayali River between Puculpa and Iquitos, where Jane wrote her first book. Later they lived with the Jivaro Indians in Ecuador, where she wrote another book. When we met Jane Dolinger,

she was writing her ninth book, Inca Gold [1967]. Jane, who was hired as a Girl Friday became an author herself, not only of books but countless magazine articles that appeared in foreign language magazines all over the world.

<http://www.ecuadortraveladventures.com/index.html>

From a link at that site, here's a picture of Gail Howard with Jane Dolinger and Gail's sister Terry Quito, from those days:



Born Mabel Jane Dolinger Dec. 9, 1932, she grew up in Pennsylvania and was a 1950 graduate of Kennett High School in Kennett Square. It was shortly afterwards that she answered Ken Krippene's Girl Friday ad, and they spent some 20 years traveling the world together. She wrote seven or maybe nine books and, it is said, more than 200 articles. When Krippene died in 1980, she retired to Miami, where she was married again a year later to Alexander Gurwood, a doctor. After his death in 1991 she moved to Hendersonville, NC, the home of a sister, Juanita Roark.

Until now, only Howard and a handful of devoted pinup fans have kept Dolinger's memory alive. Thanks to Lawrence Abbott, an English professor at the University of Pennsylvania, she is finally getting the kind of recognition she must have longed for, and certainly deserved.