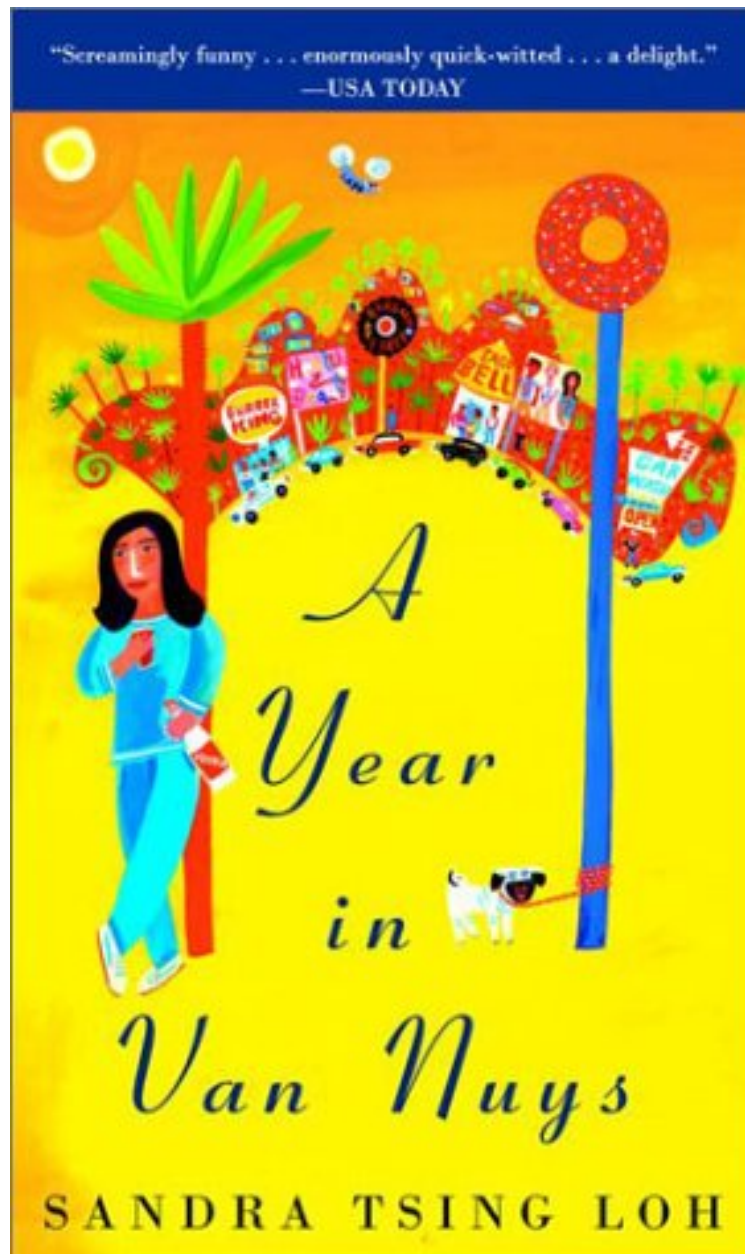


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A Year in Van Nuys

Sandra Tsing Loh

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Sandra Tsing Loh : A Year in Van Nuys before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Year in Van Nuys:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is one of my favorite books - moral support for struggling

young transplants in SoCalBy Lynn S. This is such a good book. The audio book is excellent too - she performs the voices and the one of her therapist is great. Despite the hand-wringing and disappointment, I find a great deal of hope expressed in this book as Sandra confronts the inability of life to live up to her (sometimes even modest) expectations. The crush comes from living in very competitive and costly Southern California. I've been there too. If you've ever lived in an expensive city where you were earning under the poverty line waiting for a better career to take off, you'll probably resonate with some of this story. Lowered expectations. Adjusted life expectations. Learning to see that ugliness around you in the world with a sense of humor - many poorer, young adults can relate to. ...like thinking I'll have to kill myself if I'm ever forced to buy Ikea furniture again. Oh to afford furniture not made of particle board. A primer on Southern California life for the non-wealthy. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. ParochialBy D. P. Birkett Saying that it's parochial and esoteric and only giving four stars doesn't mean I didn't enjoy it and that I don't buy every Loh. The ideal reader, however, for whom this would be a five+++ would be a female writer who lives, or has lived, in Los Angeles, watches television, and has read Peter Mayle's "A Year in Provence." Not qualifying on any of the above, I missed some of the cultural references and some brilliant satirical points were lost on me. The deficiencies are mine, not Loh's. It does not have a plot in the usual novelistic sense, except that it describes the events of a year. Some of the essays or anecdotes, such as the account of her relationship with a WEB magazine are linked. Her relationships with her husband and sister form leitmotifs. It is a collection of self-deprecating humorous pieces of the type one reads in in syndicated newspaper columns by such people as David Barry or the late Irma Bombeck. She doesn't succeed in making Van Nuys sound all that bad. I've been there once and thought it was quite nice. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Mostly GreatBy Brett Benner Sandra Tsing Loh's latest book reads more like a series of her hilarious essays cloaked in the guise of a novel. The novel's structure follows the character of "Sandra" through one year of her life as she struggles with writers block, perilously careens towards 36, and lives in of all places-horrors!-Van Nuys California. All of this is done with her bone dry humor in rare form, especially in the earlier half of the novel when she's expounding on the Zone diet, and Bally's Total Fitness. I loved the first two thirds, then felt it petered out a little by the end. Living in Los Angeles I found a lot of the book really funny, although I don't know how people outside the city would relate. However most people in their mid thirties will find her characters plight at "what am I doing with my life" syndrome very real, funny, and a little bit scary. If you're a fan of David Sedaris, N.P.R., or just like to feel like you're hip and in the know, you'd probably enjoy this.

Sandra Tsing Loh, a self-described neurotic, nonachieving, downwardly mobile "Dumpy," has started to come out of denial over the fact that she does not live in Provence. Not only does she not live in Provence, she doesn't even live in a nice part of Los Angeles. This upper-lower-middle-class suburb in the sun-swept grid of the San Fernando Valley, consistently ranked one of the worst places to live in America, whose night sky is flamed by a million fast-food neon signs and whose streets are chockablock with carnicerías, taquerías, and pupuserías, will, she's pretty sure, never be Provence. In *A Year in Van Nuys*, we find Sandra, an obscure writer, blocked at page 100 of her Great American Novel — the one that, when finished, will bring her fame, fortune, and the requisite country house in Provence. She's 35 and she has eyebags like Bert Lahr, a too-rich, too-thin sister who torments her about her lack of initiative, and a \$300-an-hour Malibu therapist. She writes for a failing women's website — *Amelia.com* — makes a disastrous appearance on CNN, entertains a network's idea about making a sitcom of her life, especially her eyebags, and watches new and old acquaintances alike succeed wildly at various pursuits. And this is merely the tip of the iceberg of a year in Sandra's life. Divided by season — *The Winter of Our Discontent*, *Spring Without Bending Your Knees*, *Summer Where We Winter*, and *Fall of Our Dearest Expectations* — Sandra's narrative charts a hilarious course through the anti-Hollywood, a morbid inferno that none other than Robert Redford called a "furnace that could destroy any creative thought that managed to creep into your brain." The result of this journey? Not thinner thighs, smoother skin, or a kind of space-age Zen Buddhist acceptance. (Notwithstanding the fact that a wise [gay] man notes that even Madonna has an inner Van Nuys.) No, the true grail turns out to be, unbelievably enough, Maturity. Which coincides, sadly, with the official end of Youth. Which, after a brief mourning period, turns out to be an odd relief for Sandra. After all, when one is no longer burdened by Youth, or Promise, or Potential, or even worldly Interest, a writer finally finds . . . the rush is over. Sandra has all the time in the world. And on a sunny blue-sky morning, a story begins to occur to her — of a 35-year-old, with Bert Lahr eyebags, who was blocked in the course of a Great American Novel in a colorful, tattered little outpost called Van Nuys . . .

From Publishers Weekly With Tsing Loh (*Depth Takes a Holiday*) behind the wheel, readers are in for a crackling, witty, loop-the-loop ride on air bags, no seatbelts across the interior landscape of an almost-40 writer coping with the pressures and irritations of modern society. She targets such social phenomena as the Zone Diet, health clubs, plastic surgery and mass joke e-mails. Old standbys like marriage, older siblings, money and advertising are deftly dealt with, though she teeters on overkill with her primary obsession, aging. Tsing Loh, whose humorous neuroses will be familiar to listeners to public radio's *Morning Edition* and *Marketplace*, struggles with the friction between where she thinks her career, marriage, health and beauty should be and where they actually rate, with hilarious fallout. This self-

described downwardly mobile nonachiever views the world through "dung-colored glasses," though her message brightens as she frees herself of youthful goals and comes to accept her age and station. Tsing Loh incorporates into her text crossed-out sentences, e-mail correspondence and outtakes from her television forays. Unfortunately, her frenetic pace and humor slow in the final section. And while the book's title suggests the looming presence of an oppressive Van Nuys, the Los Angeles suburb lacks the full intensity of Tsing Loh's ferocious stare, save for some early references (e.g., it regularly ranks as one of the worst places to live in America). But that unfulfilled promise shrinks in the face of Tsing Loh's white-knuckled, dirty-fingernailed imagination. (May)Forecast: Tsing Loh will launch her new book at the Los Angeles Times Book Festival, which she's emceeding, and will tour the West Coast. Readers throughout the rest of the nation should expect to hear Tsing Loh bemoaning Van Nuys on the radio, the first printing of 20,000 copies should sell briskly. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

From BooklistThirtysomething Loh's account of the year she came to terms with the novel she'd never finish; her perfectly manicured sister; and five months spent away from her husband (he was in a band on a cruise ship) bounces from embarrassed giggles to straight-out guffaws. Interspersing her autobiographical musings with e-mail from the Web site she wrote for, squiggly diagrams suggesting Roz Chast gone mad, and encounters with her spouse, sister, therapist, and former coworkers, Loh reaches quite lovely heights of parody. A high point is her skewering of writers' groups ("Before you take that year off and write a novel, ask yourself, when's the last time I sat down and read one?"), but she's equally sharp when characterizing her mother-in-law's conversation ("fractals of stories") or insisting that she has no cultural identity whatsoever. She does have minor plastic surgery, and she's not kind to the one person featured in her account who actually is middle-aged, but it's fractured, funny, and reads like an extended NPR rap just before the top of the hour. GraceAnne DeCandidoCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved "...Bridget Jones on crystal meth...with killer observations and killer jokes ricocheting from page to page. It all works." -- San Diego Union-Tribune"Screamingly funny." -- USA Today"Smart and sardonic." -- New York Times Book