



MELISSA FEBOS

"I had always been fascinated by the ability to appear one thing and to be another," says Melissa Febos. This curiosity soon became her reality. In her revealing memoir, *Whip Smart*, Febos shares the realities of her double life as a dominatrix. "I had no idea what I was getting myself into," Febos recounts of her experience as both a professional dominatrix and a college student. "I got off on having a secret life, but it's a lot of work to maintain life in different realms."

During her junior year of college, Melissa became tired of low-paying writing jobs and working in coffee shops making lattes. That all changed when she responded to an ad offering \$75 an hour to act out sexual fantasies in an upscale S&M house in Manhattan. "On the surface I was working for the money, but I was also interested in the hidden culture. It made me confident and pushed my boundaries. I had such complex motives that I had to write a whole book to figure out what attracted me to sex work."

After four years, Melissa decided it was time to hang up her whip. "It's compulsive and you become attached. But you can't be afraid to listen to yourself when it's right for you to leave," Febos says. "But I am grateful for the experience; it made me more open-minded and a better person."

After graduating from The New School University and receiving an MFA in writing from Sarah Lawrence College, Febos has taught writing and literature at SUNY Purchase College and New York University. To this day, she uses writing as a way to process the world. "I think best when writing. When something happens that scars us or has a lasting affect, we should document it," she says.

Febos has also used this philosophy when selecting her collection of tattoos. "I try to capture images that signify experiences that changed me," she says. "Artistically, I always liked black-and-white images that were iconic culturally." Funny for a woman whose existence isn't exactly black and white. —*Tiffany Frasier*