



**Anthony Battista
and daughter
Kristin Battista-Fraze**

Anthony Battista

The adult store veteran, who was indicted for being one of the first people to distribute the porn blockbuster *Deep Throat*, reflects on the impact that film had on the entire adult industry, while also discussing the evolution of the “XXX” porn store to today’s female-friendly venues.

When Anthony Battista agreed to distribute *Deep Throat* to earn a few extra bucks to support his new family, he never dreamed that that decision would change not only his own world, but the world of the adult industry as we knew it. All he knew was that the film, which had premiered in June of 1972, had been a hit since its first showing, and when he was asked to distribute it a year later it was still bringing in money in volumes that the film industry had never seen before.

But a little less than a year after Battista began his involvement with *Deep Throat* as a part-time gig, he was indicted by the federal government for his role in the film’s distribution. Rather than let this life-altering phenomena ruin him, Battista chose instead to let it define him, and thus began his lifetime venture in the adult industry full time.

STOREROTICA had the opportunity to speak with the early porn pioneer himself on not only those early times, but on what the film has done since—for both him personally and the retail store you run today.

SE: *What made you decide to take part of the distribution of Deep Throat in the first place?*

BATTISTA: You know, I really didn’t think that I was

doing anything unusual [by distributing the film]. The movie had been playing in downtown Philly for a year, and nobody said dingo about it. My business partner and friend had the opportunity to distribute *Deep Throat* and asked if I’d like to distribute it as well to a few local areas. Being young, having a mortgage and a new kid, I was always looking for extra income. I did it to earn the extra money.

SE: *Were you aware at the time of the significance Deep Throat had on the industry?*

BATTISTA: I was somewhat aware of the social significance of the film; it had gathered national attention since its release a year before I began distributing it. But when I actually began booking the film in theaters, its prevalence was unavoidable.

For example: I finally convinced a buyer to book the movie in the Midtown Theater in Philadelphia in the January of 1974. I’ll never forget that day—it was the coldest January day in Philly I can remember. The theater sat between 900-1,000 people, and the film was set to open at 10 am. By 9 am, there was a line three blocks long to get into the theater to see *Deep Throat*.

SE: *Did the demand surrounding Deep Throat eventually die down?*



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BATTISTA: Nope. The Midtown Theater ended up playing the movie for an entire year with the same outcome time and time again. Everywhere the movie went, the same thing happened. Basically there was a belief that if you hadn’t seen the movie, something was wrong with you. *Deep Throat* was the beginning of a sexual revolution and of adult product being accepted as normal.

I personally believe that it was and is the largest grossing movie ever made, due largely in part to its content and risqué-ness. It was something feared—and the more people tell you something is bad for you, the more you want to do it. People were infinitely curious.

SE: *So what happened after you were indicted for distributing Deep Throat?*

BATTISTA: It changed my life dramatically. I lost my job and my stock broker’s license—the firm I worked for didn’t want to hear anything about the circumstances, they just told me to clean out my desk and get out. All of a sudden, I was out of a career. I had a mortgage to pay, I had car payments to make, and I just thought, “what the hell am I going to do?” One thing led to another, and I pretty much said, “hey, you branded me as a pornographer, a pornographer is what I’ll be.”

SE: *What was the trial like?*

BATTISTA: To put it simply, Larry Parrish, the U.S. prosecution attorney who we were up against and who was also a Christian minister, was determined to have porn removed off the face of the earth. He went about creating a scenario using the theory of vicarious liability to criminalize anyone who had anything to do with the

movie. And the ‘70s were nothing like it is today; most people had never even seen an X-rated film before.

So what the court had done was rent out a giant theater to show the movie in order to shock the pants off of the jurors and judge. These people were good, God-fearing Christians, none of whom had ever seen a movie like that. We knew immediately we would be convicted. We were on trial for 10 weeks, and when it was all said and done, the jury took less than 20 minutes to find us all guilty. We didn’t even have time to stretch our legs and get a coke before they had come back with the verdict.

SE: *But that wasn’t the end of the trial, was it?*

BATTISTA: No. It was the middle of 1984—10 years later—before the entire process and appeal was over. [Editor’s note: Battista and others were eventually found guilty; Battista was fined \$1,500. For more information on the trial, please see the supplemental story on the book on page 17.]

SE: *Why do you think Deep Throat had the impact it did?*

BATTISTA: First of all, as I mentioned before, the content and risqué factor. But also because when this film came out, it could only be bought in a 40-pound can; there was no general distribution. The scarcity factor played a huge role as well. As time went on, we caught up to the eight-track video, then the VHS, then the DVD. As each new angle of technology came out, movies became easier and easier to transport. By 1990 you could put a movie in your pocket and play it on your computer.



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continued from page 15

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Technology has made it easier to privately view these types of films, but in the early ‘70s that didn’t exist. I honestly think there will never be another movie with such a large impact as *Deep Throat* solely because of technology.

SE: You mentioned that because you were branded a “pornographer,” it led to the idea of making a career in the adult industry. How and when did you enter the industry as a retailer?

BATTISTA: I got involved in the operations of adult retail stores [in Florida] because it was a necessity and it was also very interesting. We opened The Premier in Orlando in 1973, The Todd Theater in Tampa in the late ‘70s and Beach Video later, among others. I’ve seen it all—I remember when the first VHS adult tapes came out and sold for \$75-80 a piece.

SE: As co-owner of multiple adult retail stores since the ‘70s, what has it been like watching the industry transform into what it is today?

BATTISTA: I was there when the adult theaters changed to stores, then the stores became more female friendly; the stores initially were geared towards males because that’s all that would come in. But eventually, with no more yellow lights or back rooms or hidden cameras, more and more women came in. Today, most if not all products are geared towards the female persuasion, and most of us don’t even call them “adult stores” anymore. We meet the criteria for the general population and this is big business. You see that, for example, at shows like ANME. It’s a multi-billion-dollar organization, and it’s only that way because this is what people want.

SE: What were adult stores like in the ‘70s and ‘80s?

BATTISTA: In the old days, it was a theatre, and it was dark. There would be prowlers in there. You walked into a darkened room and there was nothing but some seats. Today those places don’t exist, mostly because of the internet and technology. The peepshow booths used to be prevalent in the ‘80s with the advent of VHS tapes.

Also, the first adult toys in ‘70s do not compare at all to what’s available today. Today you need an architect, an engineer and a host of technicians to

put a good adult toy together. Back then it was just some rubber and batteries.

SE: *What have some of the biggest changes in adult stores been throughout the years?*

BATTISTA: In a nutshell, adult stores have gone from taboo to acceptably normal. The yellow brick stores with flashing lights are no longer there. What's replaced them are stores that look like department stores that cater to mostly couples and women. Also, the mystique has dissipated. Back in the old days, if someone told you you couldn't see a film, people would flock to it. Today it's so readily available. There are adult sites with any kind of fetish or feeling; whatever you're into is there, and mostly it's free.

The change comes from being so restrictive to being so permissive. It has taken the mystique out and made our adult stores more normal—just like any other store. It's no longer a small mom-and-pop organization. It's a major retail store carrying major product brands.

Just look at the way we buy things. You can go to the computer and punch in a few things and two days later you have product on your front doorstep. It's the ease with which people can purchase product today. You also have to be much more professional today than you did in the '70s. It's a totally different world, and it will continue to change.


SE: *How is the way that adult stores are operated today different than how they were operated 20 years ago?*

BATTISTA: Twenty years ago you didn't need much. That has changed to where today, you need marketing,

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merchandising and reliable people who are knowledgeable in stores. It's no longer an easy business to get into. Today we lose adult stores rather than gain them because it was so easy to open one in the '70s and '80s.

Technology has truly changed everything. In order to sell today, you have to be as good as your sales people. You have to merchandise your product. Social media also plays a very big, important part in getting customers to your store. We didn't even have computers 20 years ago!

Today, if you don't have a nice layout and some good furniture and displays and excellent lighting, you aren't going to make it very far. You have to be every bit as good as the local department store. It's not a small investment anymore to compete in the market we have today. 

StorErotica Interview EXTRA by Brittany Black

The Pornographer's Daughter: A Memoir

Kristin Battista-Frazee, daughter of Anthony Battista, pens a book that details her father's Deep-Throat-related legal battles and the impact it's had on both adult entertainment and free speech.

Kristin Battista-Frazee had a front-row seat to what many in the industry refer to as one of the most monumental moments in the history of pornography: the *Deep Throat* trials. As the only daughter of Anthony Battista, one of the original distributors of the now-famous porn film, she was there when her father originally began distributing the film in attempt to bring in more income for his young family to when he courageously fought for the life and freedom the industry enjoys today.

Her memoir, *The Pornographer's Daughter*, depicts an insider's look at the events leading up to the *Deep Throat* trial, what made the film so popular and what it





Kristin with her father (and mother) in the 1970s



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continued from page 17

was like to come of age in the *Deep Throat* era.

SE recently spoke with Kristin to get the background info that surrounded her decision to write the book, as well as her own personal stance on the trial and the effects it had on herself and on the adult industry as a whole.

SE: *What initially prompted you to write a memoir surrounding your father’s role in the Deep Throat case?*

BATTISTA-FRAZEE: It started with a desire to learn about my family’s history. During my research I saw the documentary film *Inside Deep Throat*, and it was gripping for me because it touched upon some of the things my father encountered while distributing the film.

There’s a scene that scans over a court paper and my father’s name is visible among all the people indicted. This really hit home for me. Many people know the story about *Deep Throat*’s actors and the film makers and its impact on our culture, but the impact on my family was an untold story. I was the girl next door whose family was living a normal life until it was upended as a result of the federal prosecution of this movie.

SE: *Were you surprised about any of your findings on the case or your father’s role in the case?*

BATTISTA-FRAZEE: What surprised me the most was that the government went to such great lengths to prosecute a movie that today would be no big deal, and that there was so much fear about the film’s impact.

I’m also amazed that there is still a great deal of angst around sex and pornography but yet, at the same time, sex is so out there in our culture.

SE: *How do you feel your father and the Deep Throat trial as a whole has effected the adult industry as we know it today?*

BATTISTA-FRAZEE: I think the *Deep Throat* trial created this national conversation about pornography, sexuality, morality and free speech and laid part of the

legal groundwork for the unsuccessful prosecution of obscenity cases in the future. The result of this trial did nothing to stop the adult industry growth, even though those prosecuted were found guilty.


Because my father and his partners fought these legal battles, even when they didn’t have to, it made the expansion of the brick and mortar retail business possible. It’s also remarkable that my father was able to guide the stores through over 40 years of transitions in the adult industry from theater to video store to adult novelty boutique shop.

SE: *What kind of impact did the trial have on you personally?*

BATTISTA-FRAZEE: *Deep Throat* opened peoples’ minds to imagine female and male sexuality as being equivalent, and striving for this equality made women fearless and influenced fighting for equality in the workplace, access to birth control, the legalization of abortion and a host of other issues.

The past legal actions against pornography have influenced my views on free speech and how important it is. We’re not all going to agree with each other’s viewpoints or with what’s obscene, but we live in a country where it’s important to exercise our free speech rights.

SE: *Do you feel that your father and the others involved in the case get the recognition they deserve today for what they ultimately did for the adult industry?*

BATTISTA-FRAZEE: No, I don’t. My father and his business partners may have not produced, starred or directed the movie *Deep Throat* or are as famous as Larry Flynt or Hugh Hefner, but they fought the same battles with less resources and star power. They quietly were behind the scenes trying to survive and do what they believed was right. 

For more information on Kristin Battista-Fraze and her memoir, please visit Kristinbattistafraze.com.