



# Up Close and Personal with Kelly E. Carter

By Devon Avery

"I just keep reinventing myself," Kelly E. Carter said, smiling with the ease of a woman who always has a plan. Beginning with her determination at age 9 to be a sports writer, she has also taken on the worlds of entertainment, travel and wine.

Windsor Hills, where Kelly was raised, is considered the "Beverly Hills for black people," she explained. Having Ray Charles and Ike and Tina Turner as neighbors may have prepared her at least a little for the star-studded future awaiting her.

Contrary to what Kelly said was a popular saying at the time, "If you want to hide something from a black person, put it in a book," Kelly spent all her spare time at the library immersed in reading and writing. And, she said readily, "I drove my mother nuts reading billboards aloud."

A shy, skinny kid with buck teeth, Kelly announced confidently her intent to be a sports writer. Admitting she wasn't much of an athlete herself, her brother Kevin defended her, "She was decent." Kevin was an athlete, though, and Kelly his biggest fan. "I went to all his games. It made us very close."

"Unlike business or politics, sports writing is honest," Kelly said. After achieving a degree in Sports Journalism at USC, she interned as a feature writer for *San Bernardino Sun*, but persuaded the sports editor to let her write for him on her days off. Then it was off to the *Iowa City Press-Citizen* and the University of Iowa Hawkeyes... in January. "I'm an L.A. girl. I didn't even have a coat!"

On the road, Kelly introduced herself to every local sports editor, which got her a job at the *Pittsburgh Press* and then, the *Dallas Morning News*.

With an offer to cover tennis — "I don't know anything about tennis" — but convinced it was the right move, she had six weeks to become an expert. "At Wimbledon, my story had so many errors, a fan wrote and just eviscerated me," Kelly conceded. "He was right."

As dreams go, this was atop the

clouds, a call from the *Orange County Register* to cover the L.A. Lakers. Her mom was so proud, and understandably, couldn't grasp why Kelly would take any other job ever. But being tapped to report on the NFL for *USA Today*, a national publication, was impossible to turn down.

Later, as CNN and *Sports Illustrated* partnered to compete with ESPN, Kelly became their on-air field reporter. "My voice and personality did not translate well to the camera. I was really great," she said, with a genuine laugh. "I got fired!" Well, it was a mutual agreement.

So the girl with a plan was an out-of-work woman at 35. But, not for long. She pitched her idea for a sports celebrity column to sports editors, but it was *People* magazine that picked it up. After time, though, "Covering celebrities' lifestyles left me feeling empty. I wasn't learning anything, and I had no life."

Traveling to Tuscany with friends, "I decided I wanted to move to Italy," Kelly said, and casting eyes her upward, "I'll meet a Count, get married and spend the rest of my life there."

Starting with Italian lessons, she prepared to move. But a health crisis overcame her mother which, within months, caused her death. Many years later, Kelly's able to smile about the timing, "Gee Mom, if you didn't want me to go, you could have just said so."

Delayed but undeterred, she did move to Florence and then to Positano. Freelancing and picking up celebrity assignments — "I had to pay the rent" — she became a pretty good investigator, tracking down the likes of George Clooney across Europe. Eventually running out of money, "I like my fancy things," Kelly allowed, she came back to the States.

Once home, Kelly contacted Amistad Publishing about her travel book, *Bellini For One*. Instead, the editor offered her the opportunity to co-author a book with Venus Williams. A bestseller, *Come To Win* is a compilation of interviews with "top profes-

sionals who share the principles of success in athletics that inspired them in life."

"I saw the power of Venus Williams' name," Kelly said in awe as she went to work lining up interviews with Condoleeza Rice, Bill Clinton, Vera Wang and many other luminaries.

When the economy plunged in 2008, Kelly said, "You have to use what you know." Extensive travel with her dog Lucy led to her next endeavor, creating thejetsetpets.com, and then signing with *National Geographic* to pen, *The Dog Lover's Guide to Travel*.

Her brother Kevin said proudly, "Kelly can write about anything. She excels in so many fields and is very versatile."

In the midst of her book, Kelly's boyfriend moved to San Francisco, and she decided to go with him. Regularly "driving over to Napa through the vineyards, a peace would fall over me," Kelly sighed. "It reminded me of Italy."

Becoming the editor for *Haute Living* magazine, and newly single, Kelly announced, "I want to live in Yountville," but the closest she could find was a rental in Rutherford, where, after Lucy had passed away, she adopted her dog Honey.

Always open to opportunities, Kelly formed a Napa-centric communication consulting business. When Michelle Baggett of Alpha Omega called her for advice on a PR person, Kelly responded, "How about me?" Initially considering the winery as a client, Alpha Omega had a more exclusive idea in mind as their Director of Communications.

"Kelly has truly embraced being a part of the wine industry community, and we are so happy to have her on our team," Michelle said. And Kelly is equally pleased, "They are good, caring people."

Wrapping up her plan, Kelly and Honey have recently made Yountville their home. "I always thought I'd move back to Italy," she mused, "but this is my Italy."