

Isles Life

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Punta Gorda Isles and Burnt Store Isles

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Toby Lynn
of Punta
Gorda Isles



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Photo by Judy Lynch, Judy Lynch Photography



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By Susan Hunter | Photos by Judy Lynch, Judy Lynch Photography

Toby Lynn was born in Miami Beach to a custom cabinet maker father and journalist mother. Her parents were originally from Brooklyn and the Bronx in New York.

Toby grew up wanting to be a jeweler and worked through high school for a small custom jeweler in Miami Beach. After completing her schooling in Miami, her best friend growing up was

living in Los Angeles and Toby moved to California to become roommates, and to focus on her love of fine jewelry. She immediately began working in the industry, furthering her bench-work ability, and becoming certified through US Gemological Services to grade diamonds and gemstones. This experience led to a position with a national company, eventually moving her to Atlanta through a transfer in 1978.

Atlanta offered Toby the ability to be closer to her family, who were still in the Miami area. She worked for the Guild Division of Zale Corp., at Bailey Banks and Biddle managing special events, inventory purchases and merchandising for 26 stores.

In the early 1980's she became very interested in real estate investing. She attended a seminar by Robert Allen who authored several books on subjects including creating wealth and buying real estate with no money down. After acquiring the knowledge, Toby purchased a couple homes for rentals. By 1987, she was loving this new hobby and chose to move into the mortgage industry. With mortgage rates at 15+%, there was a lot of creativity necessary to put deals together. She became passionate about the mortgage business and her newly found entrepreneurial spirit.



Toby (left) at sister's wedding

In 1992, she had her own small mortgage brokerage firm in Atlanta. She then got a great offer from one of her wholesale lenders, Taylor Bean and Whitaker (TBW), to become part of their company. They were developing the big downtown Atlanta loft conversion business which was just getting started. Changing old abandoned warehouses into loft condominiums left the developers and home buyers unable to secure financing because these properties didn't fall within the required lending guidelines. TBW needed the creativity and expertise Toby had. Ultimately



Toby with her Grandmother, 1982

a deal was made with Fanny Mae agreeing to close loans on loft buildings for two years and then reevaluate to determine if the loan performance was good enough to open for all lenders. It was an exciting opportunity. The primary owner of TBW got into trouble and eventually ended up in jail! Luckily for Toby, she had an idea there was questionable business going on and had left the company a year earlier.

She always knew she would retire with a boat in her backyard "and not on a trailer." By 1999, she knew it was time to plan for her eventual move back to Florida. Requiring "good water" in her backyard, she quickly found that Punta Gorda was a much better buy than Naples or Sarasota and her money would go much farther. She purchased her current home that year which she rented out for 14 years.

Originally the plan was for 2007 to be her year to move here, but the recession forced other plans. "I was concerned this market at the time would never be able to support me. So, I spent several more years hopping into Google Earth and taking my virtual boat out from my backyard and virtually driving it out into the harbor. My backyard was my computer screensaver for the whole 14 years!"

In 2011, Toby started making trips down to Florida to get to know the area better. Toby had no friends or connections in Punta Gorda at that point. On one trip down, she met Lynn Doty of the Keller Williams real estate office in Punta Gorda. It turned out they had mutual real estate friends in Atlanta. Toby wanted to make the move at that time but knew her chances would be better, and the economy would probably be better if she waited a couple of years.

She also knew the company she worked for at that time was not very Florida friendly, so there was no possibility of staying with the same company and transferring down. She changed companies in Atlanta to a company that was already dealing with Florida so she could make the transition. Her plan was to increase her Florida business knowing that she would be in Punta Gorda eventually. In early 2013, Lynn Doty called saying she had just signed a contract with a lender who would provide in-house lending for that office. Lynn told them she wanted Toby to be their in-house



loan officer. Toby at first said no because she was concerned it would make her look flaky to change companies and then change again so quickly. It took three tries until Toby finally realized it would be her way to finally realize her goal of living in Florida.

In 2013, Toby made the move to Florida into her home and became a full-time Florida resident. She spent six months going into builders' models looking at Florida design styles to get in tune with the colors and styles being used here since they were so different than what she was used to. She had her floor-



ing choice in mind for 10 years but realized it wasn't a popular Punta Gorda choice. After deciding what she wanted, she had a major renovation done to her home in 2014. She does a lot of entertaining in her home, including barbecues and a party for the annual boat parade, which comes right past her backyard.

As much as Toby loved being part of the Keller Williams family, it was difficult to break through to Realtors in other companies. Expanding into the outlying counties was also difficult because it seemed the Realtors had the wrong opinion of her business acumen, thinking if she didn't live in their county she wouldn't understand their business. "That is so not true", Toby explained, "I close loans in all of Georgia and Florida and the guidelines are the same no matter where you live. Toby persevered and has built a nice business.

In 2015, Toby decided it was time to open her own mortgage office. She leased space on Vasco Street for her office and opened a branch office with *The Mortgage Firm*, whose corporate headquarters is in Altamonte Springs. *The Mortgage Firm* employs approximately 450 primarily in Florida. They offer the attributes that she requires but is small enough to be highly responsive, as opposed to a giant lender that wouldn't offer the same level of service. She was perfectly happy in her office on Vasco Street but then the historic *Green House* on Sullivan Street became available. She purchased it last August, just before Irma rolled through and immediately lost her contractor who moved on to bigger jobs in Naples and Marco Island. Finally

renovated, she moved into the *Green House* December 2017. Toby absolutely loves being downtown. She had been teaching Realtor training classes off-site and now has a classroom in-house for the free seminars she offers to local realtors about financing options, sales education, using social media, etc.

Toby is divorced and enjoys Latin-style dancing, cooking, traveling, and entertaining.

She's had wonderful opportunities to visit many countries around the world, most recently India in 2016, and still has a pretty long list of more. She is a graduate of Leadership Charlotte Class of 2017. Toby is a member of the Action Committee of the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce, the Women's Council of Realtors, as well as the Board of Realtors, and she's a CMPS-Certified Mortgage Planning Specialist. She is certified with *Boots Across America* which is an organization to help military personnel and their families by educating housing professionals on how to work with them to get them into a home of their own. Since 1987, Toby has had a commitment which she calls a "Core Purpose"; to improve lives, offer honesty and integrity, and hold a high level of service to their customers.



Toby, her parents, and sisters

Her friends in Atlanta ask her when she's coming back home, and her reply is always "Punta Gorda is my home, and other than having a Starbucks closer, I could not be happier."