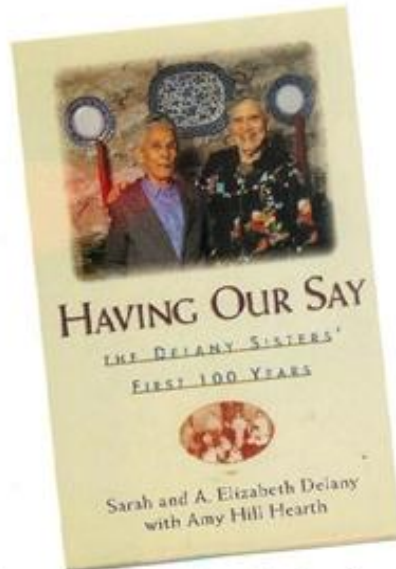
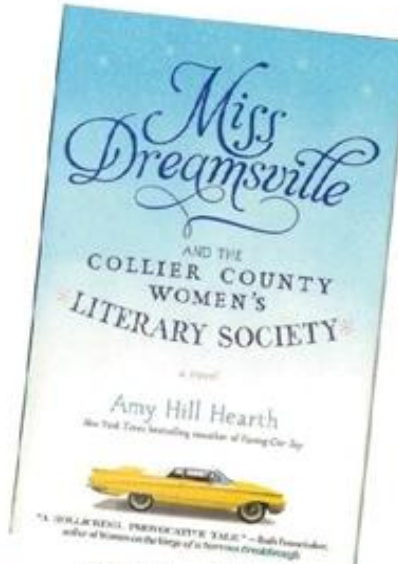


So You Want To Be A NYT Bestselling Author Workshop

A nonfiction classic.



An acclaimed debut novel.



To learn more about all of author Amy Hill Hearth's books, visit www.amyhillhearth.com or www.simonsays.com

Why I Write

I was raised in a family that cherished its elders. Perhaps this is why I love older people and their stories. My paternal grandmother died in 1997 at the age of 101. I grew up knowing that older people are worthy of respect and attention. I understood (in a way that many people apparently do not) that older people were not, in fact, always old. Indeed, they were once young. And middle-aged. And they had many stories to tell.

My mother's family, who were of German descent, came to America through Ellis Island. From them I came to understand the immigrant experience in America, the difficulties assimilating, the longing at times for a home faraway.

Through my father's lineage, I am a thirteenth generation American. Our ancestors include a Dutch woman who arrived in America via shipwreck on the New Jersey seashore, a female Lenni-Lenape Indian born circa 1700, and a band of brothers who fought for the Colonial Army during the Revolutionary War.

As a child, I recall playing in the converted ice house near my paternal grandparents' cottage in Lake George, N.Y. The ice house had long been turned into a garage, guest room, and storage area, and it seemed to have become a repository of family memorabilia. There were cannon balls and bullet fragments from the Civil War, ancient wedding rings of gold as thin as thread, and photographs of serious and somewhat scary-looking people, but I understood that

these were my people, long dead, but mine. Whoever they had been, they had saved these items for me. And so I had a comfort level with history and the past that is probably unusual.

My mother was a homemaker and my father, an electrical engineer, a profession which involved relocating every few years. The experience of living in Columbia, South Carolina from age 6 to 12 was especially important to me. By living in the Deep South during my formative years, I acquired an ability with language and storytelling that is uniquely Southern.

These are the qualities, experiences and values that I bring to the table each time I interview someone and, later, when I sit at my writing desk, hoping to capture their story for posterity.

I suppose it's no coincidence that when I tried my hand at fiction, after a career writing nonfiction articles and books, my mind would turn to the past for inspiration. In fact, it is often pointed out by reviewers and readers that the narrator in my novel, *MISS DREAMSVILLE*, is an older woman - 80 year old Dora Witherspoon - who has a story from her youth that she is ready to share. "I want young'uns to know about my time and place, the people I knew, and a world that's all but gone," Dora says.

Whether I am writing fiction or nonfiction, these are the stories I feel compelled to write. As Sadie Delany once told me, "Every older person has a story to tell. If only someone will listen."

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The Making of a NYT Bestseller

How One Chick Did It

By Susy Flory

It was not my plan to write a book that would become a NYT bestseller. I never thought it was possible or that it could happen, but it did. I've been a writer and speaker since 2004. My fourth book, *Thunder Dog: The True Story of a Blind Man, His Guide Dog, and the Triumph of Trust at Ground Zero*, co-authored with Michael Hingson, released August, 2011 from Thomas Nelson (now part of Harper Collins). *Thunder Dog* was an instant bestseller, reaching #1 in e-books and #3 in nonfiction on the *New York Times* Bestsellers list in September, 2011.

- Ranked a bestseller by USA Today
- An Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Sony featured product multiple times
- A Book of the Month Club pick
- National Media attention included CNN, 700 Club, Hallmark Channel, Joy Behar, People, Readers Digest, Guideposts, Cesar's Way, Publisher's Weekly
- Translated into German, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Indonesian, Dutch,
- Portuguese, and others
- A TV production, kids' book, and sequel in progress

You might be thinking, "A bestseller. Who, me?" *Yes, you! This is doable. Not for every person. Not for every book. BUT....it is doable.*

TOP 8 TIPS

Going to the next level with principles that powered *Thunder Dog*

1. **Obsession.** Write from obsession. What stirs you up? What makes you angry? What makes you cry? What makes you joyful? What stirs up your passion? What are you obsessed with? That obsession will carry you through the years ahead as you write and market your book. My first book was about *The Da Vinci Code*; I was obsessed with Dan Brown's novel because a good friend believed it was a true story and it drove me crazy so I wrote a book about it.

2. **Know the competition.** Who writes the big books YOU want to write? Get those books, tear them apart, and study them. Follow the masters and use them as mentors even if they've never met you and never will. My favorite writer is Laura Hillenbrand and I've learned much from her about how to write big books that appeal to a wide audience.

3. **Top tier writing secrets.** Some tips on craft—Appeal to universal themes. Read *Hit Lit: Cracking the Code of the Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers*, by James W Hall. He analyzes ten mega selling novels to chart ten universal themes that reveal humanity's deepest common needs and concerns. The more of those themes you can touch on in your work, the better. Also, take pains to make your work conversational. Most people read at a sixth or seventh grade level,

so your writing needs to be clear, cogent, and compelling. Finally, use imagery and primary sources to make your writing come alive. For a book project on women who changed the world, I went into a welding shop and learned how to weld for a chapter about Rosie the Riveter. Go do some welding if you need to.

4. **Never eat alone.** Many writers are introverts. I am. Most of the time I'd prefer to be at home or with a friend or two. But I am trying to learn the secrets of networking and connecting with other people. Read *Never Eat Alone* by Keith Ferrazzi—the idea is to create a lifelong community of people you can help and who can help you. Collaborate, trade projects, inspire and entertain; don't repeatedly spam people about your new book.

5. **Marketing should be fun.** The biggest dirty word in publishing, for most writers, is *platform*. Publishers want big numbers and it's an incredible burden to put on a writer's back. But what I've learned through a lot of trial and error is you have to enjoy marketing or you won't be able to keep it up. I love Facebook so I hang out there with multiple pages and marketing techniques, including Facebook ads. It's fun!

6. **Surround yourself with experts.** Find people smarter and better than you. Ask them questions and then do what they say. Look for a writing coach, accountability partner, writing mentor, critique partner, encourager/cheerleader, literary agent, admin assistant, marketing or PR person, financial/tax advisor, or a professional organizer. I recently hired a professional organizer to overhaul my office. When we finished, I felt like a burden had been lifted and I could move forward. There is no shame in accepting or seeking out help. Also, create a focus group of target readers for each book project and feed them chapters as you write for their honest responses. You need to know early on if your story is engaging, makes sense, and touches emotions.

7. **Embrace business.** Publishing is part art, part business and once you've tried to navigate a contract or royalty statement, you'll know you need help—we all do. Business practices change and we need experts and advisors to help us. Conduct your writing as business. Get a business coach to consult from time to time. Not only do I have a set of writing goals, I also work from a written business plan with plenty of numbers and dollar signs attached.

8. **Identify as an entrepreneur.** If you're a writer, you're also an entrepreneur. You create new things, find and meet needs, and take risks. You run a start-up. And you're living the dream! Think big sometimes. At my first writers' conference, I wrote down a goal of writing and publishing five books in five years. I actually wrote five books in eight years; one of those was *Thunder Dog*. Am I a failure? No—if I'd never created that goal, I might not have ever written this book. If thinking big is hard for you, get yourself around people who think big; it rubs off.

If you have any questions or want to connect, feel free to email me at susyflory@gmail.com. You can also find me at www.susyflory.com.

TIPS AND TOUTS ABOUT GETTING ON THE TIMES BEST- SELLER LIST

By Sherry Suib Cohen

- About how many books do you have to sell to put you in the “best seller” category? A round number, is 35,000 -40,000 more or less. Depending on whatever other books that week are selling well, even this number might not do it. About 500,000 books a year are being published according to *READER VIEWS*, an influential book review site. 98% of those books will sell fewer than 500 copies, each. You do the math.
- Luck and gaming can get you on the list. Gaming counts more than luck. My number #1 gaming tip: Make friends with the book store manager
- No matter who your publisher or co-author is, take personal responsibility for the successful marketing of the book. It ain’t fair—but that’s life. You care about the book more than anyone else does (even more than a hot-shot star co-author). She/he already has a fabulous career—yours might rest on the success of this book
- Get great blurbs: be in charge of asking for the “name” blurb even if your co-author is Tom Cruise or Paula Deen
- If you’re not an expert in social/promotional media—hire one.
- Get yourself on TV or radio. Don’t wait for the publisher to get you an appearance on *Kelly and Michael*, an *Oprah* production, *NPR*, *Jon Stewart*, *the Colbert Report*..... It’s not so hard to do.
- Can a self-published book make the *New York Times* best seller list? Yup. Can a first time author with no money to spend on PR make the list? Yup.
- If you’d love to write a best seller with a certain celebrity, and you have reason to believe you’d be a good bet for the celebrity to hire, how to get to him/her? Through an agent. Check WME (William Morris Endeavor) to see if they handle your celeb.

My Road to a *New York Times* Bestseller

Kathleen Flinn

My quick bio: I started my career as a journalist, working for newspapers and magazines. By age 28, I had written a thousand stories. Around the same time, I went to work as the restaurants/food producer for Sidewalk.com, Microsoft's series of city guides. It was a great job, but then Sidewalk got sold to our competitor, Citysearch. Long story short, via a friend-of-several friends, I met a man named Mike who helped me get a job working for MSN in London. Microsoft over-promoted me to a middle manager role, and unceremoniously "reorganized" out of my job while I was on vacation. That's where my book starts.

The elevator pitch: "After I left my corporate job – or, it left me – I sold a 401k and headed to Paris to pursue my lifelong dream to study at Le Cordon Bleu – and fall in love along the way."

Timeline:

Lost/left my job: December 2003
Started at Le Cordon Bleu: January 2004
Left to get married: July 2004
Started vaguely on proposal: September 2004
Wrote query to first agent: November 14, 2004
Officially signed on with that agent: December 16, 2004
Continued to rewrite proposal: Six months, until June 2005
When New York editor said I was "unlikeable on the page": May 2005
Hired an outside editor, cut proposal from 88 to 66 pages: Eight weeks
Rejected by same New York publisher: June 28, 2005
A regional publisher offered to buy for small advance: June 30, 2005 (rejected)
Agent sent out tweaked proposal: 11 July 2005
Visited 11 publishers interested in buying: July 20, 2005
Viking bought on pre-empt: July 22, 2005 (with Oct. 2, 2006 deadline)
Went back to Cordon Bleu: September 2005
Started writing book in earnest: January 2006
Hired assistant when realized hopefully disorganized: April 2006
Started writing and testing recipes: May 2006
Asked for extension on deadline: August (for Nov. 1 deadline)
Turned in main draft: Nov. 6, 2006
Returned final copy based on editor's notes: December 5, 2006
Received and returned copy editing notes: January 2007
First of three covers submitted to author: January 2007 (rejected)
Received and returned galleys: March 2007

Hardcover publication date: October 4, 2007

Good, bad and ugly things from my proposal experience:

It takes longer than you ever expected to write a good proposal. One thing that I realized in the process of writing the proposal is that I had to ask myself what the book was really about. Like many memoirs, it's a story about identity. Cooking is just the way in which I explored mine and examined elements of my life. I kept that in mind so that it was a clear theme. I came to this after getting some extremely harsh feedback. But in the end, this was some of the best things anyone said about my book – because it made the proposal better, even if it made me feel terrible. This is an email forwarded from my agent.

From: "Name omitted (editor at major publishing company)"

Date: May 26, 2005 11:33:23 AM EDT

Subject: RE: The Sharper Your Knife, The Less You Cry

Hi Larry,

Okay Charlie read it, and we've had a discussion about it. I was to circulate it this morning to all the right people for reads, but he felt, and I agree with him, that it's just not there yet.

A couple of things that have turned us off in this version. Too much history about her and her relationships. The story should begin with the two of them arriving Paris.

More narrative. We like to buy narrative nonfiction that feels a lot like fiction. There should be an arc, evocative language, and strong characters. This draft felt a little too episodic. We don't need every day in class. More Paris, more escapism.

As is, I regret to say, there's something not quite likeable about her on the page. Perhaps there is simply too much of her and not enough of the city and the cooking school.

Ouch! This was after I had already spent seven months working on it.

It's worth saying that at this point, I debated whether or not I wanted to continue with the book. I had a line on a job in the tech industry, and another more traditional journalism job. Should I just give up?

But my husband and I decided we'd spent too much time to let it go. So we decided I needed a fresh set of eyes on it and hired an outside editor. She read it over and gave me her comments too, agreed with some of the comments from this editor. She determined that I had too many characters and scenes or characters that were too vague. She noted that my proposal was too long; at that time, it was 89 pages, and a typical proposal is about 45 to 75 pages long. That editor actually wrote "boring – lose this" in some parts of the margins. My agent noted there wasn't enough conflict in the story. My sister said she knew

what all the characters looked like, but didn't understand their motivations. All this was great feedback.

I cut characters and fleshed out the remaining ones. I aimed at creating a good balance of the three major elements of my story – cooking school, living in Paris, falling in love. My final proposal was 66 pages. In the end, the editors I met said they liked my proposal because it was obvious to them how the book would read and sound, it had a strong narrative aspect, it felt like it would read like fiction, that the story would be well paced and included clear conflict. I wrote a one-page summary for all my chapters, with the opening lines that I thought I'd use back then (some remained intact) and the gist of the chapter. Each one moved the story forward, and it was clear where characters were introduced and where they impacted the story. But most importantly, I wrote the hell out of it. My husband – a gifted editor – challenged every line I wrote. I rewrote the opening two pages about 30 times until it was as good as I could make it.

In the end, a proposal is where you show you've got the writing chops to pull the whole thing off. But even this much work did not mean that when I sat down to write the book, that I didn't encounter structure problems or get stuck or have writer's block. That happens no matter what.

Some key promotional strategies:

1. Sell yourself inside your publisher, including the sales team

How many of the sales reps do you know at your publisher? You should know them. They are your first line in the battle to help you get your books. Plenty of authors focus on publicity – which is key – but not enough really talk to their sales people. For *The Sharper Your Knife*, I catered a lunch at my New York publisher that featured cassoulet served in a meeting room, the table draped with white linen, a couple of fine French wines served from real glasses. It made an impression, particularly on the key rep for Borders. As a result, I had great coverage in Borders across the country. Sure, I did the work to make the book the best I could make it, but then the sales team is often the one that picks it up.

2. Truly work bookstores

When you go to a bookstore for an event, it's important to remember that you're there to sell the people at the bookstore, not to the people who come to the event. Go early. Chat up the workers. Bring them food and gifts. Authors come and go out of bookstores. Leave a great impression. If you can get them to hand sell your books, that one event you had in the store can make a major impact. No matter where you go, visit every bookstore and sign stock. Chat up the bookstore workers if they seem into it. Follow bookstores on Twitter, like their Facebook pages. Send out holiday cards. Make friends with booksellers. Sure, Amazon is important, but one

independent bookstore alone has hand-sold more than 1,000 copies of my first book.

3. Avid supporters of your subject make the best events; the venue doesn't matter

I sold more books at a Florida convenience store than I did at the Borders on Columbus Circle in New York City. I've had great success with "house parties" hosted by readers whose friends agree to buy books; in exchange, I do a quick cooking lesson. I've had book events at wineries, church basements, restaurants, cooking schools, kitchen gadget shops and Junior League meetings. Also, go to your audience. I sought out **Alliance Française** chapters across the U.S. and set up wine and cheese meetings and for my second book, reached out to Slow Food chapters. If your book is about kids, go to big soccer matches and set up a table for their bored parents.

4. Make alliances

I hooked up with a web site, WomenWine.com. Through the founder, we set up a series of events at Sofitel Hotels across the U.S. I also cobbled together a "Win a Trip to Paris" giveaway. Le Cordon Bleu agreed to give away cooking lessons, Sofitel gave three nights hotel and a connection at American Airlines helped me organize a coupon for airfare for two. I wrote up a press release and gave it to Sofitel, AA and Le Cordon Bleu – they all sent it out via their lists. As a result, the giveaway got picked up by numerous media outlets, even *USA Today*. I had thousands of entries – all of which we put back into our mailing lists. Sofitel lured in women clients. AA got easy branding. Everyone won.

5. Target Book Clubs

I wrote a "Menu Guide for Book Clubs" in the back of *Sharper* in addition to the usual Q&A. I did this not only for readers, but for book stores to clearly position the book as a "book club book." I've sent out all kinds of flyers and information to various bookstores, I pitched online book clubs, anything to get a book club to read my book. I Skype, I call, I even visit book club groups. To date, I've participated in more than 140 book club readings of my book.

6. Make it stupidly easy for bloggers or others in the media to write about your book

Have a clear area on your site with downloadable images, a Q&A, press releases, contact information, etc. My book includes recipes so I also include not only the recipes but photos of the final dishes – and a variety so not everyone uses the same one. I've had people write "profile" stories about me on their blog or in a local media

piece with an “interview” cobbled from the extended Q&A, a photo of me and a recipe with an image – people I’ve never met, and that’s fine with me.

7. The No. 1 rule is to always be kind to everyone you meet, and especially be generous to other writers. It always comes back to you.

Always be happy. Your flight’s delayed, no one showed up at your event. You’re the one they remember rolls with it. I’ve helped authors find agents, proofread their work, give advice or simply offered them a place to crash while they were on tour. In exchange, they’ve hooked me up with great leads on opportunities and even hosted events.