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Amy Shannon Nov 8, 2017 5 min read



Featured Author: Katrina Shawver



Q: How many books have you written? How many of those are published?

A: I have written one book, a nonfiction biography entitled HENRY: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America. Before I was an author I wrote for the newspaper

and penned hundreds of columns. I also enjoy blogging, so I've written a lot, if not in book format.

Q: Do you have an upcoming release? If yes, tell me the title and impending release date.

A: HENRY officially released on November 1, 2017. It is published through Köehler Books, and is available for sale worldwide from most online booksellers.

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Q: Tell me about how you come up with your titles for your stories. Do you create

initial title?

A: For my book, the title was the absolute last and hardest thing I figured out. I decided to write a man's story, based solely on the instinct it needed to be told. I spent years writing and researching. Then, when I was ready to submit to publishers I had to a) figure out who my audience was, and b) come up with a title that was both descriptive and intriguing. I wrote out dozens of titles before I settled on the final one.

Q: Tell me something about yourself that is separate from writing.

A: I play a mean game of ping-pong, as does my husband, but we don't get to play enough. In my dream home, there will be an entire room where we can leave the table set up year-round and play in air conditioning. In Phoenix where I live, even the garage is too hot more than half the year, and basements are non-existent in this part of the country.

Q: What is that dream goal you want to achieve before you die?

A: I've achieved it—I finished and published my book after fifteen years. The bonus would be if HENRY becomes a best-selling book in multiple countries. In a different vein, it would be fun to say I visited all seven continents while I was relatively young and healthy. I have been to three – North America, Europe, and recently Ethiopia in Africa. Visiting Machu Picchu in Peru is on the bucket list as is Angkor Wat in Cambodia. I hope to return to Poland in the next few years, where much of my story takes place. Mostly I hope the bucket list of dreams never ends.

Q: Why do you write?

A: I'm definitely drawn to nonfiction, in that I write because I'm a communicator and have something to say. Real life is often crazier than anything I could dream up. From my newspaper days I loved to highlight little known stories or people in the community. My favorite reactions from readers were "Gee, I didn't know that" or "So that's why" The written word remains a powerful tool to convey thoughts, persuade, provoke discussion, or tell stories with a message. If something happened to me tomorrow, I know my words will outlive me.

Q: Do you read your own work a lot? If so, what does it do for you?

A: I can always think of one more word, one more edit, one more thought, even after my publisher says "Done" and the work is published. It's hard for me to step back and let the work sit a spell, or simply move on. There is a fine balance between fine-tuning a favorite piece of work, versus burning-out on a topic or over-writing a story such that it's no longer fresh or passionate. When I go back to read an earlier work I have one of two reactions. Either it's a pat on the back to say "That was better than I thought" or "I'm sure glad I've gotten better since then." Both are positive.

Q: What is your favorite type of music? Is there one genre (or song, band etc...) that brings out your creativeness more than others?

A: For writing and concentration, hands-down it is classical music. Classical by definition is timeless and there are many moods in music that can match what I am writing at the time. Music is my "white noise" when I am concentrating, especially if I to write in a coffee shop. Piano, strings, any of it but opera. I am easily distracted so anything with words ruins my concentration. I have two pianos in my living room and

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If I am doing almost anything else like cooking, working out, or driving, I need upbeat tunes I can sing and dance to, including Broadway show tunes. I have a huge collection of Christmas CDs, which come out after Thanksgiving. I cannot imagine a world without music.

Q: As an author, I find that the hardest thing to write (for me) is the synopsis that will be on the back cover or book's description. When you write, what is the hardest line to write, the first line, the last line or the synopsis for the book?

A: Writing a good synopsis IS incredibly hard, especially for fiction because stories and characters evolve during the creative process. A synopsis is not an outline; rather it is the high-level summary, a starting point, similar to a book trailer, in as few words as possible. Akin to constructing a house from blueprints, a well thought out synopsis can make the writing go much faster. It helps to begin with the end in mind. I do not stress or worry about great first or last lines until the last series of drafts. I often discover the great lines buried in my first drafts. Alternatively, sometimes they just come to me when I am in the shower or driving and I rush to write them down before I forget my momentary brilliance.

Q: Any final thoughts that you want to give to your fans or even future authors?

A: My strongest advice to new and future authors is to be curious. Read, read and then read some more. Try different genres. Read a variety of authors. Until recently all my writing took place after I came home from a full-time job, often writing late into the night. Reading existed as an entertainment luxury I rarely got to, especially with other demands of life. I had to reframe my thinking. For writers, reading is essential enjoyment, escape and a study of other writing styles and great writers. Now I schedule time to read, and I keep a highlighter and sticky notes with me. When I find great lines, new words, or a technique that works, I mark them so I can find the passages again and learn from them. A good writer never stops learning, and my writing has grown because of it.

Secondly, never underestimate the importance of mastering basic skills and craft. A writer's toolbox begins with great vocabulary, knowledge of grammar and style, active voice, and more, all honed by consistently writing. As in any endeavor, quality will come from investing the time, acquiring the right tools, and learning proper techniques. Then, and only then, does inherent talent come into play.

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