

Samantha Paris on December 13, 2017
The *Finding The Bunny* Debut / Holiday /
Voicetrax 30th Anniversary Gathering

There are several people here I have to acknowledge tonight and I will immediately start with my incredible husband Graziano for preparing such a wonderful meal for us all!

And sitting at the helm organizing this event, is Roni Gallimore who just like 5 years ago organizing our 25th anniversary picnic, has worked so hard and has put so much into this evening. Are you a glutton for punishment? I'd also like to thank Brian Sommer, our Master of Ceremonies, all our wonderful Voicetrax volunteers, my two sisters from out of town, and Andre. All of you have done so much to pull this off and I deeply thank you. Would you guys please stand?

Now beyond creating such a memorable evening, there are a few of you here tonight who have played important roles in helping to create what I hope you will all discover to be a memorable book. My editor, Terry Bisson for starters. Guys, this gentleman is such an acclaimed writer, and when I initially Googled him and saw his body of work, I was scared to death to send him my manuscript. I had to, though, because Peter Coyote was encouraging me to do it. Terry, thank you. You are such a gracious, caring, sensitive soul and I thank you for spinning this first-time author's 6th draft into something I am now proud of.

I know my brilliant book designer Alan Hebel is with us tonight. Alan, how many times have you heard the expression, "You can't judge a book by its cover." We all know *in life* that's true, but of course as a book designer you DO want people to judge a book by its cover and I thank you for mine! It's beautiful and you are a genius!

I'd also like to thank my Book Sherpa Gail Kearns who is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge when it comes to shepherding one through this self-publishing maze. It is incredibly complicated and any first-time author lucky enough to find you, is just that.

To Vicki and Chuck... I know the thing you want me to say more than anything else and it's not "I love you and appreciate the two of you beyond measure," because you already know that I do. No, what you want to hear me say is, "Guys I promise I will never write another book and once again put you through all that I have with this one." Well I think I can offer a pinky promise but who knows

what the universe has in store. A couple of people have whispered to me that there should be a follow-up book entitled, "The Bunny Comes Home."

And lastly, to my partner in crime on this project, Nancy Balik Fitzgerald. Ladies and Gentlemen, there is NO WAY any of us would be here tonight if it weren't for her, because simply put, without her, there never would have been a book! It was her vision from the beginning and she has worked tirelessly, right beside me day in and day out. Always encouraging me, guiding me, and in all my moments of self-doubt, she kept me on the path of believing I could do this.

So, let me take you back to the beginning of this project...

I tried very hard to *not* write this book. Three and a half years ago, I began by hiring a book strategist. After getting me to answer all sorts of questions, probing for months, into both my personal and professional life, we sat down for our official meeting and she started by giving me what in her opinion the book's title should be. She wanted to call it "Voiceover". I then hired a ghost writer who, albeit well meaning, couldn't write in my voice. The first 30 pages actually sounded like something out of an old detective's novel. I spent thousands and thousands of dollars and after 7 months I was right back where I started.

Nowhere.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. "Geez Samantha, if you're going to write a memoir of course you have to write it yourself. It's like what you teach us in class. No one is going to play a better you than you. The only person that is going to be able to write in your authentic voice is you." Duh, I know that. I knew that when I hired those people. But you see, *fear* can make us do some crazy things. Hanging on to old emotional baggage that doesn't suit us, or serve us, or couldn't be further from the truth, can make you do some crazy things. I didn't want to pen my own book because I absolutely believed down to my very core that I couldn't.

First of all, with only a high school education, I was not schooled in creative writing. I didn't and still don't even remember what I learned in the English classes I was forced to take in junior high or high school. I think there was something about a 'subject' a 'predicate', that it wasn't good to start a sentence with 'And'. Oh, and you wanted to avoid writing long run-on sentences. Hmm... long run-on sentences. Isn't that the crap commercial copy writers give us? But I digress. Anyway, my reasons for thinking it was *impossible* for me to write a book went much deeper than that and if you read my book, I think you'll understand. So anyway, there I was... committed to a book project because I had told so many of you that I was doing a book, but I didn't want to write it. Time passes.

Tick... tick... tick... the universe is screaming at me to write it myself. Unfortunately, my fear is rendering me deaf... tick... tick... tick... I literally hear myself in class one night saying what I always say to you guys. That safety lies in the risk. That you must enjoy the process of learning something new. I would drive home feeling like such a hypocrite because I couldn't practice what I preached. Tick... tick... tick... until I just couldn't stand myself any longer. So, armed with nothing but ignorance and blind faith, I set out to write the book myself with *absolutely no plan...* which by the way was *exactly* how I started Voicetrax. And that simple fact, along with a strong desire to set out on a new journey, is what gave me the courage to begin. Here are the first 8 pages of the summer release audio book version, performed by yours truly, Dave Fennoy, Tom Sawyer and Damian Marhefka.

(sample available at findingthebunny.com)

Yep, that's what first came out of me three years ago and I emailed it to Nancy. And it was a mess too because since I barely type, I would just write stuff in one big blob and she would then re-type it in a book format and she would fix all my grammar, misspelled words, and would gently mention that I perhaps was using the word "f---" a little too often. She and Graziano were my initial beacons of strength and encouragement and so I kept going. However, a little while later the stinking thinking started. "Who was I writing this book for?" "What's my targeted market?" "I'm not a famous person so who the hell is going to want to read this thing?" I heard my brother and sister's voice in my head teasing me about the fact that if I ever used a word that had more than three syllables in it, they were shocked. And so stinking thinking turned into tremendous self-doubt, but somehow I knew I had to keep going. I had to live with all the ups and downs while writing this book. I had my good days and my bad. Just like you guys in your classes. And because I knew that, the more I wrote, the more connected I began to feel toward each one of you. I could better understand your fears, your second-guessing yourself, and also your elation at getting something right. Yes, with each passing month I found myself drawing closer and closer to you. And so, I just kept writing. I was looking forward to the day that you would maybe read *Finding The Bunny* and maybe have a better understanding of me. I was never afraid or ashamed to write what I did, because you all have always shown me your vulnerabilities and your bravery.

So, in the end, I did discover who my targeted market was. It was *all of you...my beloved students*. And I think you were all my unconscious "writing angels" guiding me. Maybe that's why I never suffered even a second of writer's block. I had all of you continuously lifting me up, the way we all lift each other up at Voicetrax.

In closing, I thank you. Wow. Those two words seem so inadequate because you really did help me to face and stare down most of my demons. I also thank you for coming tonight because this celebration goes way beyond just the book. 2018 will mark Voicetrax's 30th anniversary. The majority of you here tonight are either former or current students and I hope you share in the pride I feel in its longevity and what this school stands for. From the beginning, Voicetrax has been a haven for anyone with a dream... and thousands upon thousands of dreams have become realized in all sorts of ways. Also, I will never stop believing that it was you students that really built Voicetrax through your love and support of one another, which is why this is *our anniversary* and you needed to be here to celebrate it! And lastly to my family and friends assembled here tonight, you too are certainly apart of this celebration as your support of me and my journey with the school has been unwavering... for nearly 30 years.

Thank you everyone. From the bottom of my heart.