



### Excerpts from “Thank You for Asking”

The Memorex nostalgia of my childhood isn't in black and white or vivid color, but in the mousy brown of moving boxes. I lost count of how many times my mom and I packed up and hit the road in the wood-paneled station wagon of my youth, how many towns we passed through, how many schools I attended. She taught me to read before kindergarten. I became a voracious reader and devoured books as fast as a dog steals table scraps when no one is watching. I read everything, from the original Oz books to encyclopedias. I remember once even pilfering a Reader's Digest anthology I found perched on a bedside table in one of the dusty motel rooms we stayed in when it was too late to keep driving.

My only means of escape from the real world was to lose myself in a novel, becoming so deeply immersed in the story that resurfacing was like swimming against a strong current. After years of playing Alice and popping down as many rabbit holes as I could find, the sun rose to catch me waking from Wonderland into the stark reality of turning eighteen. I longed to know how to pull out the stories I could feel lurking like splinters just under the surface of my skin. I knew the more I could release, the better I would feel. Learning how to use my writing as an outlet saved my life.

I believe we only have one great love; the zealous, fiery kind that leaves you in ashes once it finally burns itself out. True love is more stable, steadier, but it will not inspire you to feed one another baklava leaning against brightly colored cushions in a dark, smoky Persian club. It will not feel right to quote Neruda, lying together in sand still warm from the sleeping sun, while you search for constellations you cannot remember the names of. You won't crash cocktail parties you weren't invited to in hotels you could never afford and eat canapes, drink wine, and dance to John Coltrane at midnight.

I lost my great love to addiction. Heroin brings the mythical Medusa to life, and she is a demanding mistress. My son was too precious to me; I was not willing to risk being turned to stone. My own recovery was not from substance abuse, yet it was a

hard-won battle to conquer my fear of being alone. It took years to heal, to be free of any echoes of my past choices. As I sat uncomfortably in a therapist's office for my third session, pretending the anxiety-induced hives along my arms did not exist, I tried to focus on her soothing tone. Among other words of wisdom, she asked, "Self-care; do you know what that is? Do you know what it means to you?" Ah. Yes. I did. I drank excessive amounts of coffee, I went hiking with my girlfriends, and I wrote. I climbed out of my despair using letters as footholds, ink as my rope. Write or die.

I learned, thanks to that third session of painful introspection, that my best work comes from personal connection, from a passion for what I am addressing. I write to release. Though I have learned through my career choices that I can write professionally and competently, it's simply in a different voice. When passion is removed, I focus on content. Through that transition, I discovered my proclivity for editing and my new career path was born. There is something tremendously soothing about resolving grammatical errors and ensuring my clients' rough ideas are polished to perfection.

I thank God every day for the child who gave me purpose. I bought a house years ago and my son has never had to pack his books into the yawning mouth of a cardboard cave. He will not be thrown into shark-infested waters and expected to sink or swim. I will paddle every meter with him, cheering him on like my mentors did for me. His eager face and the faces of each of those underpaid, overqualified helpers I encountered are how I became the bibliophile, the lover of all things literary that I am today. They are why I choose to keep reading and writing, why I choose to swim, why I choose to live.