

Introduction

(or Why I Wrote This Book)

A few years ago, I started a publishing company with my husband. We were young, knew absolutely nothing about publishing, and didn't have mountains (or even a good-size pile) of cash to start a business. But we had an idea for a book series, an obsessive love for books, and a lot of naiveté, so we did it. As we struggled to get our publishing baby on its feet, a friend asked me if I was at all scared to do what we were doing. Scared of sinking our life savings into a start-up publishing business that had to compete with publishing giants from an office in our one-bedroom apartment? Nah!

Well, of course I was. I was scared to death, actually, of everything, from losing our savings (the down payment for a house we were hoping to buy soon) to failing to achieve our dream and everything in between. In a moment of weakness, I even wrote out the pros and cons of starting a publishing company, given our lack of knowledge, resources, and the "Wow! How can I not be intimidated by this" figure of 70,000 books published every year and just a few succeeding. There were more cons than pros.

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I dared myself to do it anyway—to chase my dream of starting my own company and to beat the odds. (I was lucky that my husband was a willing partner in crime.) I knew that I could always think of a hundred reasons why it would be too difficult to do or too impossible to accomplish. But what would I be left with if I didn't take this risk? A safe, stable life filled with regret, boredom, and endless “woulda/coulda/shoulda.” I couldn't think of anything scarier than that, so I dared myself not to be intimidated and to dive headfirst into the world of publishing.

I could write a whole book to tell you about our publishing successes, and a much longer one about our struggles and mistakes, some of which were so naive we now laugh about them. But that's almost irrelevant. What matters more than anything else is that every single day I am pursuing one of my life goals—to run my own company—and I'm feeling more daring and gutsy than I ever have before. Is it a challenge? No doubt. Are there days when I'm exhausted or frustrated and wonder how long we can keep this going? Definitely. Is it worth it? YES!

Starting a company was one of the most difficult things I've ever done but to be honest with you, I'm somewhat addicted to risks, creative challenges, life detours, and anything else that makes life more interesting. The moment I feel settled or sense that my life is flowing along smoothly, I dare myself to do something—change my routine, take a risk, or simply take on a new creative project. That first step—the DARE—is the ultra-important one we all need

to take to get the greatest enjoyment, fulfillment, and excitement out of every part of our lives. To really *live* we've got to dare ourselves to DO things—change our routines, take risks, explore new ideas, and experience as many different facets of life as possible. And what I like about a dare is its surprise and inevitability. As in Truth or Dare, the game many of us played as teenagers, we don't know exactly what each dare will be like or how it will turn out, but there's no going back once we've dared ourselves to do something. And ultimately, whether we succeed in each of our dares isn't really that important, because even failed attempts invigorate us, teach us something new, and most of all, make us feel like confident and gutsy Daring Females ready to take on the world.

When I was thinking about writing this book I jotted down some of the things I've achieved in my life. Without fail, each one began as a dare to myself.

DARE 1: Too Old to Lose My Accent

When I was fourteen, my family emigrated from Russia to the United States. Talk about a shock! For a while there I didn't think that I was ever going to find my place in this new world, but I decided to at least try. My first order of business was learning to speak English better than I could after my few years of classes in Russia. I desperately wanted to sound like every other American teenager—Samantha on *Who's the Boss?* was my idol (laugh if you like). Everyone

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told me that I had started too late to lose my accent completely, but I didn't care: I wanted this so much that I dared myself to try and make it happen. I made an effort to speak only English, which drove my parents crazy, since they were just learning the language themselves. I spent most of my free time after school watching TV and imitating the sounds I heard, looked up hundreds of words in the dictionary, and wrote down and practiced the words that gave me the most trouble, often spending hours repeating them. I poured every ounce of energy I had into trying to learn to speak English like a real American. It took me years—years filled with countless embarrassing mistakes—and many times I nearly lost hope, but if you heard me today, you'd think that I sounded like a regular New Yorker—but without a New York accent!

DARE 2: MBAs Only, Please!

After graduating from college, I went to work for a big-name consulting company in New York. According to numerous career counselors, this company was not a place where many grads from a small liberal arts school like Wesleyan had landed a job. But I wanted to get a taste of the business world and to do it from New York, so I dared myself to apply and compete with top grads from all across the country. I trembled between my interviews and had to go to the bathroom to catch my breath, but I managed to put my fears aside, and months later I moved to New York to join the firm.

DARE 3: You're Giving Up THAT Job?

Several years later I realized that what I really wanted to do was work with small companies and maybe run one of my own someday. I was petrified about giving up my secure job and the nice paycheck and the perks that came with it. To top it off, my parents, friends, and colleagues all thought I was completely insane for leaving such a great job. But I woke up one morning and realized that if I didn't leave at that point, I might not ever leave and take the chance to go after what I really wanted out of life. I dared myself not to be intimidated and spent the next few years helping small businesses grow. Some of the companies I worked with made it, and being part of their success was exhilarating. Some of them failed and taught me many, often painful lessons. Despite the ups and downs, I was out there doing what I wanted, taking risks and living my life to the fullest, and nothing is more exhilarating than that.

DARE 4: You Can't Start a Business (In Your Apartment)

The itch to create my own product from the ground up just wouldn't go away, so I decided to do it by starting a publishing company. I didn't know a lot about what it would take to get the company going, how much time, effort, and money we'd have to spend just to get started, or how difficult it would be to compete with the thousands of titles published by giant companies with millions of dollars in marketing budgets. I consider myself lucky, in a sense,

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not to have known too much in the beginning or the prospect might've seemed too difficult. I knew enough to make me nervous, but I went for it anyway. I figured that not to attempt this life goal would be worse than trying and failing. It's still a fight every day, and there are days when it becomes more of a fight than I ever bargained for. Yet when I consider the books we've brought to life and all that we've created from absolutely nothing, I feel I can do pretty much anything.

DARE 5: Only Experienced Authors Get Published

Which brings me to my latest dare: to write this book and get it published. I've attempted to publish some of my writing before, each time collecting dozens of rejection letters of the "Thanks but it's not for us" variety. Endless rejection was brutal and intimidating. On top of this, I read dozens of articles about how difficult it is for first-time authors to get published, and dozens more about how it's impossible to find either an agent or a publisher. I heard stories from authors who spent a year writing their book and five years trying to find someone who'd take a chance and publish it. Talk about too much daunting information, this was it. But becoming an author had been on my Life Wish List a long time, so I dared myself to take a chance and give the publishing world all I had.

I decided to write this book to share with you one simple idea that I've learned through my own experiences:

*To get the most out of your life,
you have to dare yourself to do it.*

Whether you're reading this because you feel your life isn't going in the right direction because you've had a terrible day at work, or because you need a slight kick in the you-know-what to do more with your life, I dare you to use this book as a springboard to launch yourself into a life that's more passionate, interesting, and fun. Realize that you have an amazing power—the ability to grab life by the horns and get from it a tremendous amount of satisfaction, fulfillment, and joy.

Most importantly, dare yourself to be a Daring Female and do something with that power! Dare yourself to live with passion and gusto, and find the guts to go after what matters to you—today, right now, this moment. Whether it's overcoming a great challenge, taking a risk, trying something completely new, or simply making each day more enjoyable and fulfilling, the first step is to dare yourself to do it. This is your life and no one else can take that step for you—so dig deep, find your inner Daring Female, and go for it! So how about it?

Thanks for giving this book a shot,

Natasha

Your loyal Daring Female