



## Soapbox: You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up

*The highlights, lowlights, and downright misguided adventure of writing a book with your husband*

**By Annabelle Gurwitch -- Publishers Weekly, 3/1/2010 12:00:00 AM**

It's a warm June night in 2006 and Jeff, my husband of 13 years, is “killing” on stage at Sit 'n' Spin, a Los Angeles literary salon. The crowd is roaring with laughter at his description of how hard it is to get into my pants. An attractive man sitting next to me shakes his head in hysterical disbelief, and it occurs to me that if Jeff and I ever split up, no one will ever want to have sex with me again. An idea is born.

I write first-person comedic essays and my husband is a television comedy writer. We've been entertaining friends and strangers for years with our tales of marital missteps. We have both funny anecdotes and divergent points of view on the subject of love and marriage—we should write a book together!

Three weeks later, Jeff and I set up our respective laptops in our kitchen and begin banging out our book proposal, but after only an hour we're tearing into each other's ideas. I have questions: “Jeff, do you really think people will want to read about all the wactresses (waitress-actresses) you dated before me? Who cares?” It's clear we can't write in the same room together. We're off to a great start.

Our proposal only takes us two years to write. Armed with 100 pages, we fly to New York, and I get to watch my husband charm the pants and advances out of rooms full of attractive editors. I'm filled with love while we pitch our book together.

We close our deal the very same day. We promise to stay together until the paperback. We're so funny. But on the plane ride home, I look at my husband in a new light. The format of the book naturally invites comparison between us. What if his chapters are funnier than mine? What if he comes off more sympathetic? We're not collaborators, we're competitors!

Note to self: don't forget to put in the book the story about how Jeff drank too many glasses of pinot, fell asleep in the bathtub, and flooded the house.

We return home and the enormity of actually writing the book is overwhelming. Our chapters must stand alone, but also fit together. The book threatens to take over our entire lives. After Jeff says, "I'll read over your new chapter if you take your pants off" for the 20th time, I work the bathtub flooding story into the manuscript.

I start wondering how our divorce will affect book sales.

Jeff wakes me up in the middle of the night. He's just read a paragraph in which I've written about my flirtation with a work spouse, something I've neglected to ever mention to him. He suspects there may be other things he doesn't know and would prefer I cease writing on subjects he doesn't want to know about. I lie awake wondering how I will finish our "love story" now that I detest my husband.

I wake Jeff up in the middle of the night to tell him I'm tired of having to write on topics dictated by him, and I'm ditching the "he said/she said" format and switching to "she says/he says" chapters. I lie awake suspecting I'm a woman who uses the word herstory for history.

It's July of 2009 and we're in an emotional standoff as we head into the homestretch. Jeff e-mails me his last chapter, and I find myself weeping uncontrollably as I read his description of his love for me. I delete the bathroom flooding story. Our squabbling is the glue that holds us together, I decide. Nobody likes a pushover and nothing is more boring than someone who agrees with everything you say. Our contentious process gives me my ending.

It's February, and the book is ready to hit the stands. But, oh, the irony. We write about our fierce love for our son, but we were so distracted that we've scheduled our signing in Washington, D.C., on his 12th birthday. We're setting off on a do-it-yourself book tour where we'll be crashing with friends who include an old boyfriend, the old boyfriend a minor detail that I've neglected to mention to Jeff, until just now. We barely made it through writing the book; how will our marriage survive the book tour? Then, our *PW* review comes out, and it says: "Readers will hope they stay together to write more heartfelt, funny books like this one."

"I hope so," I say to Jeff, right before we snuggle up and fall asleep.

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