

Transcript

00:00 You're listening to the My Simplified Life podcast and this is episode number 230. Welcome to the My Simplified Life podcast, a place where you will learn that your past and even your present don't define your future. Regardless of what stage of life you're in, I want you to feel inspired and encouraged to pursue your dreams, simplify your life, and start taking action. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac, author of How to Get on Podcasts.

00:28 the podcast matchmaker and CEO and founder of the MLG Collective. I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you while taking you on my own journey. This is my simplified life. Hey friends, welcome back to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. Do you ever wonder, as you're reading memoirs, how people are able to write about some of these traumatic events that have happened to them or

00:56 What do they do with the people that are involved if they're still around? My guest today has a twist on that. Amy Nielsen shows people how to incorporate their trauma into fiction so you don't have to worry about who might be reading your book. You don't have to worry about revealing too much of yourself because...

01:22 People are believing that it's fiction that you're writing, despite some of these true life events that can pop up. And we know this is true for a lot of other novels that we've read, that I've had guests on the show of authors who remember I always ask, what part of you is in the book? And this is a part that you don't have to reveal actually happened, but it's a way for you to write about it and have it become cathartic.

01:52 Amy has an incredible story and personal journey from being a homeless pregnant teen to becoming a librarian, an author, an agent. Her story is incredible, and she has put it into a book as well. So I can't wait for you to meet Amy and to hear her incredible journey. Hello, Amy.

02:20 Hi, Michelle. I'm so excited to talk to you today. I am so excited to talk to you. We've already been talking, oh, 10 minutes. And I'm like, oh, we should probably record. But I could just talk to you all afternoon and have fun and share all of our commonalities together. You never know what you're going to have in common with people. And you always can find common ground somewhere with everyone. Yes. Yes, I'm going to say yes, right? After what we just talked about, I'm like, yeah.

02:48 There's something somewhere with everyone, right? Yes, I believe it. Can you introduce yourself to everyone, please? Sure. My name is Amy Nielsen. I am a former youth librarian of 20 years. I absolutely loved that career. I left when my youngest son was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder because his needs were very big at the time. They're a little less big now because it's years down the road. And so I'm now revisiting a second career.

03:16 As a literary agent, well, I'm an associate right now at the Purcell Agency, and I'm a developmental editor at Wild Ink Publishing, and I'm also a published author of It Takes a Village, How to Build a Support System for Your Exceptional Needs Family, and the picture book

Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder, which is a resource to teach about autism to neurotypical children so they understand their autistic peers and family members.

03:42 And then I'm excited to share that my young adult debut, *Worth It*, comes out on May 21, 2024. So it's just right around the corner. So you just have a few things going on. Just a few. And I have four children and a pup. And we live in Tampa Bay. And we love boating. When I'm not reading and writing, that's usually where we are. Although you could read on the boat. That's true.

04:10 I would dig that. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sometimes we do. But when we moved to Tampa Bay, my husband and I, it was to be around my oldest daughter and her husband, because we were coming down here to visit them all the time. So we bought a boat together, which is great. It's like being in a boat club. We show up, they do all the work. We leave, they do all the work. I like that. Oh, yes. Sign me up for that. Exactly. Exactly. So that's a little bit about me. I love it. And let's

04:39 Let's just start from the beginning, because you have such a unique story from before college, before work life. Take me back to that of how you came to where you are today. Sure, well, I lived in a small town in central Florida, and a lot of families migrated to that area because it was the booming citrus industry. And there was a citrus plant in the small town that

05:07 kind of was the economic shoulder for this community. And we moved to get to the citrus industry myself, my family, I was a child at the time. And then right after we moved, there were back to back freezes. And that pretty much crippled the citrus industry. And so as a result, a lot of the community was thrust into poverty, myself, my own family included. And during that time, when something like that tragic happens to a community, you see an increase in...

05:37 domestic violence, you see an increase in alcoholism, drug use, high school dropout. It was a rough time for the entire town. And I ended up one of those statistics. I ended up homeless and I eventually landed in a trailer park with a much older man and soon pregnant. And I lived that for five years before I said, this is enough. And I got myself out and I went to college.

06:06 and I haven't turned back yet. So, you know, just kept on going and kept on going. And my oldest daughter that was born in that trailer park that stood in food stamp lines with me, she is now one of 100 board certified, board certified elder law attorneys in the state of Florida. She currently was honored with the recognition of being secretary of the elder law section of the Florida Bar. And in five years, she will be chair. So, she...

06:32 I kind of say that I bursted the glass ceiling and then she kind of flew through it, you know. So we stopped the cycle, which is hard to do. It's really hard to do. Teen pregnancy, poverty, it becomes so cyclical and so hard for families to get out of it that I wrote *Worth It*, which is inspired by that time period of my life, to give people hope that there is a way out. And maybe it may not seem obvious. But

07:03 you can climb out of it. And also to understand, you never know why that high school girl in your class is wearing the same outfit four days in a row, which was me. And so just to kind of teach some of that empathy and tolerance and yeah, so that's kind of what inspired me to write the young adult novel was that period of my life. What motivated you and got you to that point of, I don't want to live this life in this trailer park. I want better for my daughter.

07:30 How do I get out of this and how did you do that? So that's a very important part of the book. So throughout my life, and I'm sure most of us, we get encouragement from teachers and guidance counselors. And honestly, it was those people because it wasn't coming from my family. It was those people, community members, the odd person at the grocery store, people just saying, you're worth more, you can do more. And the final...

08:00 encouragement, and it's a big spoiler, so I'm not going to give it because it really happened, is toward the end of the book, I met someone that just said the right thing that made it all click. And at that moment, I'm like, this is not the life that I want my daughter to have. And I have to do something about that. And you're young. I mean, to be a teenager and to recognize this.

08:28 It takes gumption, it takes guts, it takes strength. And you obviously did it and you made something of yourself. Your daughter has made something of herself and that's incredible. So I applaud you, congratulations. Thank you. Well, one of the best parts is she was a British lit major in college, so she's always loved to read. I passed that love of reading on to both of my daughters because I was a librarian for all those years. And even when I was living in that trailer, reading was a big part of my survival.

08:57 and I would read books like Stephen King to show me things could be worse. You know? They could be worse. How to do things. Exactly. And then I would read romance novels like Danielle Steele to show me things could be better. And so reading was a big part of my survival during that time. And my daughter runs a book club with her colleagues. She and another girl founded it. And so I'm part of the book club.

09:24 They don't let just anybody in, but I'm mothered in, she calls it. And actually this month, the book club is reading my book. So I'm very excited about that. It will be the first time that she's read the full manuscript, which makes me a little bit nervous, because this is not memoir, but there's a lot of me in it. And it's about her family too, her history, the history of her father, which is not great. And so we're reading it this month, and then I have my book launch.

09:54 May 24th at Finn's Dockside Bar and Grill, which is our every Friday happy hour ocean side hangout. And so I said, can I have my book watch here? And they said, sure. And then I asked them, I said, will you put gumbo on the menu? Because gumbo is on my book a lot. And they said, sure. So I said, can you ask the talent of the day to play 80s music? And they said, sure.

10:20 So shout out to fans. I'm going to tag you in this. You're great. I love you. Which is why we're there every Friday. I love this. And that kind of brings us to one of the topics I was hoping

that we discussed. So you brought that in beautifully of how we can write about our true selves in a novel and fictionalize it. Because I think that there's a lot of people who would love to put that out into the world, myself included. A hundred percent. Yeah. And yet...

10:47 you don't want to say this is me. And it's one of the fascinating things that I love to ask authors is what part of you is true in the book? Yeah, we didn't have that conversation in private, but actually a lot of the things that, so for example, some of the reasons why I fictionalized it, and I'm going to share some of those reasons with listeners because just because my story didn't work as memoir doesn't mean yours won't. And it doesn't mean that fictionalizing is a path

11:17 I did it for a bunch of reasons. For one, there was widespread teen pregnancy. It was an epidemic in this community. And as I was writing it, in the beginning, I kind of was jotting things down as memoir. And I began to realize that it wasn't as impactful when it was so widespread. So I wanted to zone in on this one family, this one girl, this one experience. And then also the time period. Personally, it was a five year period for me that I was living in that.

11:45 I don't know if you can say bad words on this podcast, but living in that hell. And I didn't want my main character to go through this for that long. Also, I shrunk the timeline down to a little over a year, which also helped with the pacing. But there's other things that I think authors can really think about, or emerging authors, aspiring authors, is that writing it as fiction, for me, it kind of distanced myself from this

12:15 really happened to me as I'm crafting a story. And so that, even if you don't think about your past trauma daily, it's probably lingering in the back of your mind. And none of us get out of this life unscathed. We all have probably said multiple times, I should write a book about X, Y, Z. And sometimes reality is inspirational, more so than fiction, but then taking that reality and put it into a standard story structure. So,

12:45 Fictionalizing can help you overcome it. And one of the reasons that I also liked writing this as a fictional story is you get to decide the outcome. You get to decide what does my protagonist get in the end? What does my antagonist get in the end? That he probably didn't get in real life. You know, so you get to be the author of your own story. So I really liked that aspect of it as well. The other thing, and I'm learning this as a new associate literary agent, is that memoir is a tough.

13:14 sell. And if it's a tough sell to editors, it's a tough sell to agents. I've had many memoirs pitched to me and I'm just like, I just don't know who would read this. Who would be your target audience? And so as a memoirist, if you're not well known or don't have a huge platform, your target audience is probably friends and family. And so that's a tougher sell. There are some breakout memoirs that do amazing. And I actually have signed a memoirist, but...

13:42 you know, fictionalize it gives you all those creative liberties. It gives you the tools to tell a story, to use a standard story structure and all of those things. So I think that's one good reason that authors should consider it if they want to write, you know, something about their own lives. I

think that memoir is definitely hard, especially when I've read a lot in the past year and some I just went, really?

14:10 Are we whining about this? Because some of it feels like that. And you're right. And if you are trying to sell to your family and friends, is that really who you want to sell your memoir to? I'd rather have a stranger read it. Yeah, exactly. I had a friend years ago. She has passed. She was my library volunteer. And she had an incredible childhood. And.

14:37 She wanted to write a memoir about it for her family, for her kids, for them to know. And so she did wait for a certain individual to not be here anymore before she felt the freedom to write it. And she did write it and she was older. I helped her with the editing process. This was long before I was an editor. I was just the librarian. And then, and she did self publish it because she wanted it out for her family. And so I a hundred percent supported.

15:05 in that, you know, tell your truth, it's important to you. And sometimes memoir is the perfect vehicle, but I think just the broader your reach is, then the better your book is gonna sell for sure. And the broader audience you can reach for change, which I think ultimately as writers, we all hope that yes, we want our writing to entertain, but if we can entertain and evoke change at the same time, that's just the best feeling in the world.

15:34 Oh, I love that. That's going to be a quote. I love when that happens. How did you come about to become a librarian? And this is kind of funny because I never, I went to a very small school. I lived in a very small town and our library was teeny tiny, like a bedroom size. And yet lately, I feel like I'm in touch with so many school librarians and even my children's librarian. I talk to her every week when I'm in the library and

16:01 Like this is kind of a cool job, like what you're doing. The best. Yeah, the best. How did you come about that? Well, I went to college again as a single parent and I went to college to become a teacher because as a single parent, I wanted the same schedule as my child. I wanted to be involved in her education in ways that my family was not. So that was the reason why I chose. And I'd always loved working with kids in the community and in my neighborhood. And so.

16:29 I went to college for elementary education, got out, taught second grade for three years, and then I just had my second baby, my second daughter, and I was about to go back into the classroom. And teaching is a lot. It takes a lot of time. And I always, like I said, had been a big reader, but I'd never thought about, you know, library as a job. And the library of the elementary school I was at had just left and the job was open. And I don't know if it was...

16:56 I asked the principal or she asked me, but either way we ended up talking and she's like, do you wanna give it a try? I'm like, absolutely. So I knew nothing about the Dewey Decimal System and all of these things. And having the biggest budget on campus, but I quickly learned and it didn't go back to college. It went to UCF and I got my K-12 library media certification within that year. And so I was at the elementary library for 10 years, which is one reason I love repping picture book authors so much.

17:26 And then I was in middle school for 10 years. And middle school was probably my favorite age range to get books into the hands of, because sometimes they are more reluctant readers. And my principal used to say there were three places on the campus that all the kids ran to. They ran to the gym, they ran to lunch, and they ran to my library. And that was such an honor that, you know, I tried to create a space that this was not a space you had to come in and shh, this isn't study hall.

17:54 This is where we are vibrant. We are talking about books. I would buy books specifically for, I would pay attention to like the incoming fifth graders and what they liked. It would make sure that if I've got a bunch of kids and the magicians, I have magician biographies and just truly tried to tailor the collection to my clients. And so that was just so much fun. It is one of the best jobs. I was a librarian when all the Harry Potter books came out. So that was...

18:23 just an amazing time to watch children walking around with 700 page books that had never picked up a book, you know, and standing in those midnight lines at Barnes and Noble with my oldest daughter, just a great, great, great past to have. I love that. Now we have graphic novels, and I got to say, I'm not a fan. I'm like, no, you're just reading the cartoon. Can we actually read a real book? Yeah, well,

18:51 And I had many graphic novels in my library because sometimes those are what you can get those reluctant readers to pick up, you know, and to get a book in their hands and maybe transition them into something a little bit longer later. But it's definitely an art for sure. Yeah, my son keeps going, Mommy, your next book could be a graphic novel. I'm like, no, it's not. I don't know where you get this from. But he's nine. So he's like, no, really, you could write a graphic novel. Maybe it's a memoir.

19:17 That's a graphic novel. Sounds like he's into graphic novels. He currently is, yeah. And you can see me going, ah, can we read something else, please? He loves the Who Survived or I Survived books. Oh, yes, my son loves those. I Survived the Titanic. We've got so many of those, yes. My youngest son that's on the autism spectrum, everything that he's interested in has to do with a big explosion, a big natural disaster.

19:47 you know, Godzilla, just all these, just larger than life things. I love that, I love that. We've been watching Love on the Spectrum on Netflix. Love it. It brings a whole new meaning to the autism spectrum for us. Yes. Like we feel for these parents already and then to witness love truly happening right in front of you and how happy these parents are.

20:16 to see their kids, it's so beautiful. So I have so much admiration for you and what you're doing and raising your son and leaving your job to focus on him as well. It's amazing. Well, thank you. It's been a long journey right before I got on the phone with you. I was on the phone for about an hour and a half with a parent that just got a diagnosis. I do some caregiver coaching.

20:43 for parents, especially in the beginning stages, because there's a lot of questions that parents have. My son and I were just in a movie about nonverbal autism with Rachel Barcelona,

who is Danny Bowman's best friend from Level the Spectrum. Oh, yeah. Danny Bowman's the graphic designer. Yes, yes. Oh, she's brilliant. Yeah, every time she comes on, I'm like, oh my gosh. She's like a millionaire too. She's really smart. So we were actually just.

21:11 got to see that film for the first time. It's called Mandy's Voice. Mandy's Voice film, I think, is the website. It's a short film about nonverbal autism. And my son and I play small parts. And when I say small, like blink and you miss us. But I did get a speaking part in a movie. And they had a festival in Tampa and he and I got to go see it for the first time. And we filmed this like two years ago, because it's been traveling film circuits. And so one of his best friends

21:39 a little girl that's one of his best friends, she came with us, she and her mom, and she shows up like in this sparkly dress for the movie premiere. And I got pictures of her and Barkley on the red carpet. And then they got to watch his film debut. And so it's really important that all children know that they can accomplish big things in life. And I think that's just such an incredible message that we can bless our children with that despite your challenges.

22:08 we all have them, everyone can accomplish something big. And big is different to everybody too. So. I love that. Oh, I can just see them together. I wanna go see that picture. How cute and how sweet. And what I love is that there's just this pure innocence of love and happiness. We watch it and we feel like we're punishing ourselves because every episode we cry. My husband and I are always just like, oh.

22:36 look at those. We cry every single time and I'm like, let's cry. We're having a marathon. We have to watch a whole season one sitting. It's beautiful. Yeah. And when something moves you to tears like that, that's powerful. That's powerful. And I've had several of my friends that have read my novel Worth It and then have cried, cried, cried, cried, cried. And

23:04 So this is a funny story about the importance of critique partners. So my BFF critique partner, Dana Hawkins, she writes sapphic romance and sickly sweet. I mean, it is rainbows and unicorns all over. She writes just such sweet novels. And then mine is opposite of sweet. Like there's a lot of trauma happening to this teenager. And so in the beginning of our critique partner journey, she's now got multiple books published and I'm just so proud of her.

23:33 She's the reason why she and my other writing bestie, S.E. Reed, are the ones that encouraged me to go into agiting, so I appreciate their encouragement. But Dana would read a chapter of mine, or I would read a chapter of Dana's book, and I'm like, Dana, everything here is so nice and sweet, and I'm so glad these girls are happy, but you gotta throw a rock at them, come on. I gotta, they gotta have, they gotta break up. This is a romance, they gotta break up and get back together, there's gotta be a little trauma.

24:02 And then she'd read her chapter of mine and she'd be like, Amy, your main character really needs a hug right now. Like, I know. I'm like, all right, I'll let her have a break. But it's having critique partners. A lot of times we think we need to attach to a critique partner that writes the same genre, same age range and everything. And I've benefited the most by critique

partners that write outside my genre and write different age ranges. So just wanted to throw that nugget out for people looking for critique partners. I love that.

24:32 an earlier interview I had this morning, I was being interviewed and we were talking about my book coach and she knew nothing about podcasts, which was so beneficial for me because she came at it with, I can read it, I can understand it, I can apply it. So exactly the same type of thing of who can, who's going to understand this book and you don't have to just stay in that one single lane. Exactly. And I have your book in my cart. I need to go ahead and get it, but I got so much out of your episode.

25:02 with David, Thrilla 101. Yes, thank you. I mean, so much. And I think I told you, I copied the link and sent it to all the authors at my publisher and said, everybody please go listen to this right now. And I'm gonna ask follow-up questions. I've actually listened to it twice. That's how informative it is. So you packed so much into that episode with him. He's great. I was on his podcast before too, which is why I listen to it now, which is where I heard you and how we connected. So I...

25:31 I love in all communities, the writing community, the podcasting community, there really is community. Yes, absolutely. And support. Yeah. There's really no competition. Like there aren't podcast hosts who are like, I want to outdo you or what? No, we're all just happy to share. And you know, that's why I wrote my book is I want to share the same way that you have written your book. You want to share and hopefully help somebody out there.

26:00 That's why we do what we do. And I, again, a beautiful thing. I keep saying it. I'm like too many repetitions of it, but it truly is. I can't emphasize it enough. Well, I was just at a conference in Tampa, the writing day workshop, which is fantastic. If anybody has a writing day workshop coming near them, I urge you to go. Authors can give live pitches. Agents can receive live pitches. And there's also panels and speakers. And it was, it was great. And I was on a panel.

26:27 And I can't remember exactly what the question was by the person that asked it, but my answer was, and I give this answer to people, parents that I'm coaching through learning how to redefine the new normal for their family with exceptional needs, and also to authors that I'm working with, is that in any industry or any community, you need three best friends. You need someone that's a little bit ahead of you, that's where you wanna be, that's willing to kind of serve as your mentor.

26:57 and then someone that's where you are right now that you can go to, like that critique partner, that you can, oh, I just got another rejection and they understand and you can lean on each other and learn and grow together. But I think the most important part of your community is the person coming right behind you, that person that you can mentor because none of us gets where we are without a bunch of people helping us along the way. So that's a bit of advice that I try.

27:24 you're going to find that when you give back to whatever community that may be, that that's where you get the most growth yourself. I totally agree. I reference Amy Porterfield so

often of give as much as you can away for free. Yep. Because in the end, people will go, oh, well, if you do that for free, what are you going to do when I pay you? Well, the same thing is true when you give your knowledge away for free and you help those around you. You lift them up and then in turn, you're lifted up. Yes, 100%.

27:54 and I do have something free for your audience. Oh, we love freebies. So first off, I have a blog post on my blog, www.fivereasonswhy.com, five reasons why you should fictionalize your past trauma, but it has a few more tips in there about that. Anyone can get that, but I have a Goodreads giveaway going on right now for *Worth It*, but I wanna offer a special giveaway for your listeners.

28:24 So I'm going to create a blog post and I will send you the link that will let your listeners know what to do to enter the giveaway and I will send them a copy of my book signed and if my swag is in in time I'll include a little bit of swag and hopefully the story of Angela can inspire you to be that for someone else to give someone in your community that needs a compliment, encouragement, a lift, hopefully you'll get a tip or two.

28:54 I love it, thank you. I can't wait to read it. Thank you. I'm gonna go enter the giveaway. And go put it in my cart too. It is on pre-order right now on Amazon. And if it does sound like something that your listeners might be interested in, it does help authors in pre-launch to get those pre-orders. And what else did I wanna say? I guess that was it. It is on Goodreads. So if you are interested in reading some of the reviews and some of them have just really touched me.

29:24 deeply what people are saying. And so that's the goal, you know, that hopefully what I'm putting out there in the world moves people into evoking change. That's so important to me that I just wanna leave this world a better place than when I came into it, you know? Yeah, yes. Even if that's just impacting one person, just one, like that mom I just talked to earlier, just fills me with joy, so. That's amazing, yes. I fully agree. If you can change the life of one person.

29:53 And you've accomplished a lot, a lot more than some can say they're doing. So that's amazing. Amy, you're incredible. I can't wait to read your story. I loved hearing about it. And I'm just so excited that we've connected and get to be friends and talk some more. Thank you. Absolutely. And so, again, thank you so much for having me. And I look forward to sharing the link with you and meeting some of your listeners over there on my website. Yes. Thank you.

30:24 Well, friends, if this wasn't the conversation to let you know that you can get through whatever it is that you're going through, then I don't know what will help you realize that. Because Amy went through so much as a young person and she pulled herself out of it incredibly. She created this beautiful life for herself, for her daughter, for her family, and look at her now.

30:53 writing about it and sharing it with all of us. What a gift. I encourage you to share your story to turn it into fiction if you feel that's the way that you want to talk about it. But share it. Allow that for yourself. Allow it for others who might be going through what you're going through. Share your story. It is such a beautiful gift that you can give to someone to help change their life,

31:23 I just encourage you so much to please share. We are all listening. We wanna hear those stories and they matter. They change the world and they're a blessing for those of us who get to hear from you, to hear your story. So keep sharing, reach out and let people know that they aren't alone. That is such a gift that you can give. I'm so grateful to Amy for.

31:49 allowing us in to see what her life has been like and for sharing it with each and every one of us.