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**From Top of Your Field to Newbie Novelist—Libby Gill Shares Her Long Journey to Publication & What it Taught Her About Tenacity**

*By Libby Gill*

When you grow up like I did, in a family shaped by alcoholism and mental illness, you learn to escape early and often. My two favorite forms of escapism, when I couldn't actually get out of the house and stay over at a friend's, were my own imagination and books. And from the time my seventh-grade English teacher read a sci-fi story I'd written aloud to the class and my friend Cathy hated it, I knew I had some special power that not everyone possessed.

Sadly, living with narcissistic parents, five siblings, and enough trauma that I literally wrote a [book](https://www.amazon.com/Traveling-Hopefully-Family-Baggage-Jumpstart-ebook/dp/B00F8I1990/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=261XYQHB261PX&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.-xPkJJpDuQaGMOesSqNzSA.F8d3i1HRMbs3Q-1qwVC0MlYnnbsZMEKIMeG5aDjPwtI&dib_tag=se&keywords=traveling+hopefully+by+libby+gill&qid=1753462157&sprefix=traveling+hopefully+by+libby+gill%2Caps%2C169&sr=8-1) about it, takes a big chunk out of your confidence. But it also makes you resourceful. By the time I turned 18, I had a job and an apartment and I was on my way to getting a degree in theater. A few years later, I moved to LA and doubt reared its ugly head again. Though I wanted to act, I got a job at a talent agency helping other actors get work. And when I wanted to write, I got a job in a studio PR department, promoting other writers' creations.

Fortunately, I was smart and a harder worker. I rose through the studio ranks, from assistant to department head and ended up heading PR and communications at television divisions of Sony, Universal and Turner Broadcasting. I was writing all right: press kits, briefing books, interview prep. Everything but my own projects.

While I was at Universal, planning my next chapter, I decided it was time to learn how to write a book. My friends encouraged me to write one on public relations, but having worked as a publicity exec on shows from *Married...with Children* to *Jerry Springer*, I'd had enough. I looked around for a fresh idea and decided to interview families where, like mine, mom was the primary breadwinner and dad was the primary caretaker. I bought a book on how to write a book proposal and, after a year, I was ready to go.

I started querying and finally landed an agent who sold my parenting book to Penguin. By then, I was a television development executive working in the early days of reality TV. (Barry Diller had just spun off the television division he'd purchased from Universal into a new company and I'd gone with them.) Even though I hadn't signed a contract and there was absolutely no conflict between my working on *Sally Jesse Raphael* etc. and writing a parenting book, when my boss's boss caught wind that I was writing on the side, I was ordered to New York and told to choose between the company and the book. I chose the book.

Then the real panic began. I left the corporate world, started an executive coaching business, published my book, got divorced, and bought a new house. With a mortgage and the need to provide for my two young kids, I was determined to make it as an entrepreneur. As I grew my business, I began writing nonfiction books about professional development and leadership. I knew I'd eventually write a novel, but, like a lot of writers, my fiction career had to queue up behind family and finances.

Finally, when my coaching and speaking career solidified, I started writing a novel about a widowed female soil scientist who becomes involved with a television producer. I put the book-in-progress aside twice (for two new nonfiction books which drove my business) and my critique group gamely shifted gears and gave me notes on manuscripts which became my books [*You Unstuck*](https://www.amazon.com/You-Unstuck-Mastering-Rules-Risk-taking/dp/1932361685/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=3AG5QYVWLTJH3&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.OqfN_wfLcHFcYrVaB-52-iUQrdsYrL2HkRRGcIPiEHjGjHj071QN20LucGBJIEps.j493rBqBPZHNOPRJ3Ysyv2BqtcPkEA3PW4sqzh1m70I&dib_tag=se&keywords=you+unstuck+by+libby+gill&qid=1753462219&sprefix=you+unstuck+by+libby+gill%2Caps%2C166&sr=8-1) and [*The Hope-Driven Leader*](https://www.amazon.com/Hope-Driven-Leader-Harness-Power-Positivity-ebook/dp/B0DSCPM9QK/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=8ZVD7NBTRR78&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.WIG-7kP9VE8MbKpx9UjcLQ.5xzAbiURZtoVhZ4M8OxfsoaSPmLRBatdkERxoLjZ3zs&dib_tag=se&keywords=the+hope-driven+leader+by+libby+gill&qid=1753462260&sprefix=the+hope-driven+leader+by+libby+gill%2Caps%2C165&sr=8-1).

COVID changed everything for me, as it did for most, when a keynote I was scheduled to deliver in Silicon Valley in March 2020 was abruptly cancelled, signaling the start of the pandemic. Then my entire speaking schedule evaporated. I was grounded, with more time on my hands than I'd had in years. I decided to dust off the novel that I'd been slowly pecking away at. I wouldn't set any speed records for completion, but I knew I'd get there eventually. And I did.

By this time, I knew a number of nonfiction authors, but no novelists, and I asked several of them for referrals to literary agencies. I queried three agents. One passed telling me she had another novel in development about a soil scientist. (Yeah, right.) But as I was literally enrolling my schizophrenic brother in a group home in Florida, I got a call from another agent—she wanted to rep my book. Then she got a bite from Penguin Random House. When I tell people I sold my debut novel to a Big Five publisher, I try to put it in context so they don't hate me: I'd spent 30 years honing my writing chops, nearly eight years working on a novel which was constantly interrupted by other people's needs, but I finished it. And I got very lucky. Believe me, I'm aware of the role that luck and timing—and maybe my mom smiling down on me for taking on her role as caretaker—played.

I'd written what I considered to be women's fiction, but PRH wanted a contemporary romance. At their direction, I made the male lead a little younger and sexier, the female lead a little older and prettier, and cut out most of the supporting characters' stories. (That last bit hurt, but I'm still hoping to use those stories as "bonus material.") There were numerous rounds of edits and several disagreements over story arcs, but [*Malibu Summer*](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0143137921/?bestFormat=true&k=malibu%20summer&ref_=nb_sb_ss_w_scx-ent-pd-bk-d_k0_1_14_de&crid=25YCFNE7BNIHT&sprefix=malibu%20summer%20) was finally in print.

And I was a novice author all over again.

I didn't know anyone to ask for cover blurbs, to book me for print interviews or podcasts, or to guide me on building a readership. In fact, I was so new that I had no idea that the *enemies turned lovers* copy line my publisher had placed on the Amazon listing was a well-known romance trope, or that HEA (happily ever after) was a romance requirement.

I started building my new career. I'd done it before and I knew I could do it again. I closed my one-on-one executive coaching business, though I still keynote at conferences. (There's absolutely no shame in having a day job and it can definitely keep the financial fears at bay.) And I explained to the subscribers on my mailing list that I was going in a new direction and invited them to follow along if they were interested. Thankfully, most of them were.

I did all the things that authors do nowadays in order to build an audience for my current book as well as the next one, including creating an author-specific website, developing more followers and engagement on social media, and saying yes to practically any book-related invitation that comes my way. As I write this, I'm about to embark on what I call my Girlfriends Across America book tour, staying with friends and reading/signing at bookstores in each town.

Now, despite PRH having dropped my option, I'm halfway through my sophomore novel and I have a much better understanding of my place in the market. I am a proud author of single-title romantic comedies (as opposed to category romance, which are series); with, I hope, wit, smarts and charm. Katherine Center and Jennifer Weiner, both brilliant writers, are my comps. Nora Ephron is my hero. And tenacity is my superpower.

[](https://bookshop.org/lists/titles-featured-on-the-Podcast-and-in-the-newsletter%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

