

Author Amy Krouse Rosenthal broke convention with her 2005 memoir, *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life (EOAOL)*. The book, released in the U.K. in 2008, was praised everywhere from NPR to CNN for its unique format as well as its witty and universal insights on what the author refers to as “the ordinary stuff of daily life.” Amazon.com named it a top ten memoir of 2005.

To date, Rosenthal has also published eleven children’s books. Her books *Duck! Rabbit!* (2009) and *Cookies: Bite Size Life Lessons* (2006) received starred reviews, and both spent time on the *New York Times* Bestseller list. Her website is <www.whoisamy.wordpress.com>.

Amy Yelin: In the “Evolution of this Moment” section of *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life*, you bring up several early memories that subtly chart your evolution as a writer (e.g. your English teacher asking you to keep a journal, your mother telling you she thinks you’re going to be a writer). Was there one moment in particular that stands out for you as the single most telling moment in your “evolution” as a writer?

Amy Krouse Rosenthal: I wrote “Evolution” for my own sort of edification regarding how somebody becomes who they are or does what they do. It does seem to me more like the gradual unfolding of a plan. I feel like I’m doing what I should be doing—from my first word being “more,” which I think is also indicative of my overall vibe, to all the other things I wrote about like my fascination with words and store signage as a kid, or my ending up working in advertising as a copywriter.

Yelin: You first published an adult book called *The Book of Eleven*, followed by a couple of books about motherhood, some children’s books, and your memoir. I’m wondering if you see yourself as more of a children’s writer, an adult writer, a mommy writer, or a humor writer?

Rosenthal: I really don’t like to put myself into categories. As a writer, I don’t have an agenda—meaning I didn’t use one type of writing as a springboard to do another type of writing. Some people have said, after *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* was published, “Ah, now you’re doing kids books.” But that’s not it. I was writing children’s books before. I love doing all of the writing. I think the different genres help and feed one another. For instance, sometimes when I’m working in the adult realm, it will give me an idea for a children’s book, and vice versa.

Yelin: In *EOAOL*, you write about how you went on a letter-writing campaign to authors, contacting those writers whose work you admired. What did you hope to achieve by writing to them?

Rosenthal: I think writing letters is a reflection of our natural inclination to reach out when we really love something. You don’t want the experience to end and you also want the author to know how much his or her book or essay meant to you. I know a lot of writers and readers do this. What it’s all about is a bit unclear because you’re not always asking for anything in return. But you have this feeling that you have to stay connected.

An example for me would be David Shields, author of the book *Remote*, a very disparate collection of brief musings and thoughts about life. When I read his stuff, I was already doing something similar, but I felt a bit uncertain as to whether or not it really counted as “writing.” Seeing his work published was definitely validating. So I wrote him. In this case, I knew that he was a successful writing professor in Washington and I loved his writing so much that I really wanted to study under him by taking his class long distance but I found out that wasn’t an option. We did, however, end up staying in touch for a while. The beautiful, full circle thing was that he ended up reading *EOAOL* after it was published and I got an e-mail from him that was a really sweet note about the book. I think he knows how much that meant to me.

Yelin: Do you have any formal training in writing or are you pretty much “self-taught”?

Rosenthal: I guess I don’t have any *formal* training. I’m moderately educated. I went to college. But I didn’t do any formal training in writing. I majored in French.

Yelin: What is your opinion about the formal MFA in Creative Writing? Did you ever consider one?

Rosenthal: I think it's so individualized and subjective. Each person has their own path and their own solution that's going to work for them. As an undergraduate, I was a really good student but I was so relieved when I graduated. There's something about the whole nature of school and tests for me. I say to my kids, "I'm so glad it's you taking that test and not me." I prefer to learn by doing. After graduation, I was ready to get into the workforce immediately and worked hard to get my first job as an advertising copywriter. I wasn't attracted to an MFA program. I didn't want to do workshops. I also had kids pretty young and had only so much time to do my writing. So I asked myself: *Do I want to do the writing, or do I want to go to school to study writing?* I just wanted to do the writing. Other people take different paths.

Yelin: In reviews, your writing voice has been compared to people like Jerry Seinfeld and Erma Bombeck. Did those comparisons surprise you?

Rosenthal: I think those comments come when someone reads something specific. If people were reading all my material, those comparisons wouldn't be relevant. That being said, I'd take that comparison any day. I love both Erma Bombeck and Seinfeld.

Yelin: From where do you think you get your sense of humor?

Rosenthal: My family, I suppose. My parents—particularly my dad—are really funny. Not that they were performers in the Catskills or anything, but they're funny.

Yelin: I once took a humor writing seminar with authors Tom Perrotta (*Election*, *Little Children*, etc.) and Dan Zevin (*The Day I Turned Uncool: Confessions of a Reluctant Grown Up*, etc.). One of them—I think it was Dan—said that whenever he would revise, he would scrutinize over words and try to replace them with words that would make the piece funnier. Do you do that? Or do you have any other techniques that you use for humor writing?

Rosenthal: When I'm writing I don't think I'm consciously trying to be funny... maybe for some pieces. But usually what I'm aiming for is *accuracy*. For instance, in *EOAOL*, when something comes off as funny, I think it's because people can relate to it. They read an entry and think, "Wait, that's me! I do that!" So does that mean I'm funny, or is human nature simply funny?

Yelin: While we're on the subject of accuracy, I know that you submitted yourself to a lie detector test after you wrote *EOAOL* because you wanted to be certain you were portraying your story truthfully. You wrote a "My Turn" column for *Newsweek* on the experience in which you explain how some observant readers noticed that in a more recent author photo—the one in the paperback version of your book—you are wearing earrings. These readers called you on it because in *EOAOL*, you wrote an entry about how you gave up wearing earrings. What was your response to this incident? And can you speak a little bit about "truth" in memoir or the concept of "truth" vs. fact, for instance?

Rosenthal: Let's start with the issue about the earrings. I thought a lot about that when it happened, and I thought, *Am I lying?* I wrote in my book that I gave up earrings in my early twenties. It was one sentence. I also said I don't wear a watch. Okay, so I still don't wear a watch. And yes, in my twenties I stopped wearing earrings but then, like the *Newsweek* article said, many years later, I put on earrings for the book party. So was it "true" when I wrote that I gave up earrings? Yes, absolutely. It was 100 percent true. But what's also true is that people are allowed to change. Now can we quibble and ask ourselves if this is a transgression, the fact that I wore earrings despite writing in my memoir that I don't wear them? Maybe. But is it terrible? Probably not. If I said I was locked up in my basement for part of my childhood and then it turns out that I actually had a really happy, normal childhood, now *that's* a true transgression. That's a biggie.

Yelin: In an interview on Bookpage.com, David Sedaris says, "I've been trying, especially with this book, to pull back a

little from exaggerating, which of course is my natural inclination.” I’m wondering if you ever find yourself, if not “making things up,” exaggerating a bit for the humor or entertainment value?

Rosenthal: I get that same feeling when I read David Sedaris sometimes, and I really love his work. I give him credit for saying that. But in terms of my writing, I don’t know. In general, I don’t feel like exaggeration is one of the tools in my bag of tricks, but if I’m doing it and I don’t know I’m doing it, I’d like to know!

Yelin: Anyone who writes memoir and personal essays can’t avoid writing about the other people in their life. Has this ever been an issue for you? Has it ever kept you from writing something, or created a conflict with anyone—your husband, for example?

Rosenthal: There are some writers whose platform is making fun of their loved ones, and it’s funny, but it’s not my thing. The only person who gets the short end of the stick in my writing is me. I’m fine airing my own flaws, but in general, if you go through any of my work, I’m not interested in complaining about my family publicly. I’m more interested in sharing the everyday stuff. Usually people are just surprised that I remember these weird little things about them. For instance, when I wrote about my friend Charise and how she was thinking of dyeing her hair red and she asked her husband “How do you think I would look as a redhead”? And he replied, “Lonely.” She read that entry and said “I can’t believe you remembered that!” But when she told me that little story, I thought, “Wow! Genius, I love it!”

A lot of my friends made “appearances” in *EOAOL* and unless I’m kidding myself, they’re all these fine little memories and no one was upset. In fact, at the book party, they all showed up and I made name tags for them with their corresponding page numbers!

Yelin: Do you always let people know ahead of time that you are writing about them?

Rosenthal: Not really. With *EOAOL*, only Charise and my husband read everything ahead of time. Most people had no idea they were going to be in the book. For instance, there was my friend Steve from junior high who I talk about in the childhood memory section. After the book came out, I got this e-mail from him out of the blue. I hadn’t talked to him in two decades, and we reconnected because he saw himself in the book. I suppose if I were writing something questionable about someone that I thought might cause a problem, I would tell them. At least I hope I would do that.

Yelin: During the Bookpage.com interview I referred to previously, Sedaris says, “It seems like literature, or at least recent American literature, teaches you that unless you grew up living in the back of a car, or unless your folks were in prison, you really don’t have a story to tell...(they) don’t see any value in their own lives, when actually it depends on *how* you write about it.” When I read this quote, your book came to mind. Did you have doubts about your ability to move people with your story because, as you write in the book’s foreword, “I have not survived against all odds. I have not lived to tell. I have not witnessed the extraordinary.” And if you did have doubts, how did you keep moving forward with the work?

Rosenthal: I think I had equal doses of self doubt and personal conviction, and I felt that I was doing the thing I should be doing. How those two things coexist, I’m not sure. I wrote the whole first draft of *EOAOL* in a vacuum—I didn’t talk about it with anyone. I had no idea what the agenda or takeaway of *EOAOL* would be. In the end, what it turned out to be was the story of *everybody’s* life. I heard from thousands of people—not just in this country, but beyond—girls, boys, men, women, professors, housewives. I couldn’t believe it. I’d get an e-mail from a thirteen-year-old followed by an e-mail from a sixty-year-old, both saying that the same entry resonated with them! I had no idea it was going to have this sort of impact. Now I look and say, “Of course, this makes sense. That’s what I was doing!” But I didn’t see it while I was writing it.

Yelin: Can you give me one or two entries/insights that you discovered resonated most with readers? Anything that really surprised you that was universal?

Rosenthal: There are probably a couple dozen that I heard repeatedly. A really frivolous one that struck a chord would be the “Q-tip” entry, where I wrote about the great, undiscussed pleasure of putting a Q-tip in one’s ear. Still, I think the biggest

surprise for me was not really a particular entry that people responded to, but the sheer volume of people who thought that this book was about them. How bizarre that at the end of the day we're all the same—whatever our demographic, our occupation, our age. We all experience life in more or less the same way.

Yelin: There were many entries in your book that resonated with me. The one that stayed with me the most, however, was a more serious piece called “Tears.” What I found so powerful about that entry was the insight you arrive at when reflecting on your lack of appreciation at age twelve for the suffering of your former camp director who had a wife with MS and a sick child. In looking back, you write in that entry, “I don’t recall ever giving serious thought to these tragic figures.” I remember reading somewhere that you said “Tears” was the hardest entry to write. Can you say why that was?

Rosenthal: It’s an obvious answer, I suppose. I worked on that one for a long time. I specifically remember the day that I began that entry. I felt a responsibility to unearth difficult stuff, so just being there, and being in those memories, was hard. Those memories don’t feel good and they’re sad to me. I was crying writing part of it. I don’t mean to be overly dramatic. I was still in a coffee house drinking coffee, and I went home and had a normal evening, but it was still a painful experience.

Yelin: That reminds me of something Vivian Gornick writes in her book, *The Situation and the Story*. She writes that when crafting a memoir, we “Lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform events, deliver wisdom.” She notes that arriving at this wisdom is not easy: “Penetrating the familiar is hard, hard work.” Can you say anything in terms of how hard it was for you to get to what you really wanted to say?

Rosenthal: I feel like it’s all difficult. I sometimes struggle with pieces that are just two or three sentences long, trying to find the words to express what I really mean. Because you can put it down on paper, and you know it’s sort of accurate but it’s not exactly resonating right. It’s like a knob that just needs to be turned a little bit and then you’re like, “That’s great, that’s exactly it.” So in looking at *EOAOL*, whether the entry was a more passing, flippant thing like the Q-tip entry, or something more emotionally significant like “Tears,” I applied the same level of focus while writing to properly convey what I meant in the end.

Yelin: Are you saying that no matter what you’re writing—whether it’s emotionally charged or not—it can be difficult to arrive at what you really want to say?

Rosenthal: Yes. For example, I once wrote a column about text messaging templates. On my cell phone, there are ten things you can say by using a pre-formatted template. Things like, “Running late,” or, “Meet me at…” I never really use the templates, but I was looking at the ten things that were chosen and I was fascinated. The last one was, “I’m sorry I can’t help you.” So I was thinking about it, but I wasn’t sure what I wanted to say in my piece. I was curious to know how Nokia had come to the conclusion that these were the ten most common things Americans say in their text messages. Then I thought: what would be the ten things that I would want mine to be if I were to create them? Then I was wondering what cavemen would want to say if text messaging existed in prehistoric times. I put a lot of time and thought into figuring out why I was so fascinated with this idea. In the end, I discovered that all I really wanted to say was that I think it’s really sad that one of the ten most common things we humans say, according to Nokia, is, “I’m sorry I can’t help you.” It was that simple, but it took hard work and days of writing to figure that out!

Yelin: You say hard, but do you enjoy this process?

Rosenthal: Oh yes. I just want to be honest with myself. When I was working on the text messaging thing and I started going down the caveman path it wasn’t ringing true. So I had to keep working on it.

Yelin: Joan Didion, whose *The Year of Magical Thinking* was included with yours in Amazon.com’s Editor’s Choice Top Ten Memoirs of 2005 list, once wrote, “Every writer hopes or boldly assumes that his life is in some sense exemplary, that the particular will turn out to be universal.” I’m wondering if the fact that your book struck such a universal chord with readers makes you more confident now as a writer continuing to write about what you call “the ordinary stuff of daily life.”

Rosenthal: It seems, more than anything, that what this book did was give confidence to other people who want to do this type of writing. There were a lot of people who said, “Oh my god, you can do that? I want to do that now.” I suppose I tapped into a way of thinking, a way of putting words down on paper in terms of my format with those short entries that jives with the way a lot of people from our generation are thinking right now. We grew up with MTV, sound bytes, things that helped reinforce our short attention spans. I’m just a product of the mill. I think *EOAOL* gave other people confidence, people who want to write this way. Even folks who stay at home and just want to do their own personal encyclopedia for their family. I heard from a lot of people who are doing that.

As for *EOAOL* giving me more confidence to do my own writing? Sure. I definitely don’t want to do *Encyclopedia Part II* as my next book. But I never say never. Maybe thirty years from now I’ll do volume II. As for the next adult book I’m working on, I do have some doubts about how it will go. I don’t want it to be compared to *EOAOL*, but of course it will be. I don’t want to become a cliché of myself. I write how I write but I don’t want it to be, “Here she goes again doing this thing.” People get tired easily.

Yelin: You mentioned the short attention span appeal. I know that for me, *EOAOL* was the perfect read right after the birth of my son. I could just read a few entries if that was all I had time for and pick it up again later. People are so busy these days, so I wonder if a lot of people enjoyed the book for that reason as well. There seems to be an increased interest in the short-short—whether it’s fiction or nonfiction—these days.

Rosenthal: I think there’s something going on with the way our brains are changing that reflects the evolution of technology. I began reading an interesting article in the *New York Times* earlier today. It was ten or so pages of dense type. I was committed to sitting there and reading it because I really like the author, but, at the same time, I was struggling with it. I was thinking if only it had been broken up with some space between every few paragraphs, if there were more white space, more visual stuff, maybe it would have been more palatable for me to read. It’s not that we now have to be spoon-fed short little pieces, but I think there’s something in the *delivery* of the information, in the way we present it. I’m not talking about dumbing it down. But I think the way that many of us process information is changing, and thus we prefer a certain presentation when we’re reading.

Yelin: Shortly after *EOAOL* was published in 2005, you wrote an essay called “A Life Encyclopedic” on Powells.com which responded to the burning question of how you came to structure your life story in the format of an encyclopedia. In that essay you wrote: “I think that if I continue talking about the book this way... dissecting it... doing all this fancy circus-performer back tracking about the process, it’s potentially damaging.”

Do you still feel this way, as though you don’t want to talk about *EOAOL*, or how it came about?

Rosenthal: I think there’s a difference between when something is new and when it’s not. When something new comes out, for instance, whatever it is, people need to hear about it, authors need to talk about it, actors go on talk shows to talk about their new movie, etc. But after a certain amount of blabbing about the work, or about the process, even if it’s done well in an interview with someone who genuinely cares about it, even under the best circumstances, it starts to feel like you’re killing the thing with your words. I had so many interviews when the book first came out and it started to feel like I was cheapening the work. I thought, *I’m going to vomit if I talk about this thing anymore*. There’s a certain little sparkle or magic and I don’t know if it’s superstition but it feels like you could squelch that potential little glimmer of something with too much talk.

There’s a difference, however, after some time passes. Think of it this way: It’s like when you have a child. First the child (or book) feels as though it’s in you forever. Then it comes out, and it’s in the world but it’s still right there in your arms. When you’re doing your book tour, it’s like you have your infant there with you every second—it’s still very much a part of your body. Then your infant becomes a toddler and they toddle about and then, a few years later, it’s a teen... *now* you can talk about it with more distance. What I’m trying to say is that I don’t feel like I’m cheapening the work anymore. I can talk about it now and if it helps other writers, that’s great.

Yelin: So it’s safe to ask: why did you decide to write your book in the format of an encyclopedia?

Rosenthal: I wasn't drawn to the idea of writing a straight memoir. I didn't feel like I had any business being on that stage. So then, if the book wasn't a straight memoir, I had to figure out what it was going to be. It was like working backwards. I said to myself, "There's this one genre, memoir/autobiography, but it's not exactly for me. So what am I going to do?" I began spending a lot of time researching all the different types of nonfiction, all kinds of documentation, FBI character profiles, etc. Then one thing led to another and finally one night I said, "Oh gosh, I have to look at the encyclopedia. That's the ultimate form of nonfiction." So I grabbed an encyclopedia from my office and began reading the E volume, the "Einstein" entry, and I found I was immediately happy reading the encyclopedia. It's just a familiar, interesting format—the way it's paced, and there are these little illustrations and the "see also" stuff. "Einstein" was an interesting entry to read and then I got to the entry for encyclopedia which talked about the history of the encyclopedia and gave a definition. The way it was described, I thought, "Holy expletive, I totally know what I'm doing with my book! I'm writing an encyclopedia!"

Yelin: You wrote somewhere that it took you five drafts to complete the book. Anne Lamott, in her book *Bird by Bird*, has a chapter called "Shitty First Drafts." Do you agree with her idea that all first drafts are shitty?

Rosenthal: More often than not they are, but occasionally, you can get it right the first time. And to rework it then is to ruin it. It's more the rare occasion when you get it right the first time, but you have to pay attention and recognize it when it happens. For instance, in *EOAOL*, the foreword and also the last entry entitled "You" are pretty much written exactly as they appeared the first time I wrote them. Both of those came out whole, so to speak. And I still think they are the correct version, the right permutation of words. In the other ninety-six percent of the book, however, I reworked everything.

Yelin: You have three children. I'm always interested to learn how mothers find the time and energy to write. I know your first book, *The Book of Eleven*, must have been written when you had young kids. How do you balance mothering and writing now?

Rosenthal: Right now my kids are twelve, fourteen, and sixteen as of publication. I left advertising to pursue my writing when Paris, my youngest, was born. So I've been juggling it all for ten years. I don't pretend I'm a writer who only writes when my kids are at school, or at night, or at 4 a.m. There are writers who do that, and that's amazing to me. But that's not who I am. When my kids were young, I just treated my creative writing the same way I would any job. I had a babysitter and went out and wrote in the afternoons. Since then, my writing schedule hasn't shifted much. The bulk gets done every day between 1:00 and 5:00 p.m., which is the best writing time for me. I never write at home. I take my laptop to a coffee shop and get away from the Internet. And as far as my kids are concerned, I'm still a pretty hands-on mom. I'm not with my kids every second, but I'm always available. I have not missed much of their lives.

Yelin: Did you know you wanted to write children's books before you had children, or have they been your inspiration?

Rosenthal: I don't remember feeling so inspired by my children that I ever said, "Now I want to write children's books." It was more like this birth of my writing beyond copywriting, which included a lot of different things. I immediately started writing in all these different genres. Some of the writing material would turn into magazine columns, some of it would be fodder for kid's books, and some of that early material would develop into my first published book, *The Book of Eleven*.

Yelin: One of your earlier children's books, *Cookies*, was on the *New York Times* Bestseller list in 2006. It's a wonderful book that uses the act of making cookies as a vehicle for teaching kids about some big concept words like compassion. What was your inspiration for that book in particular and what was the process of writing it like?

Rosenthal: I have no idea. That book came out whole. I didn't change a word.

Yelin: What about the other children's books? Like *Little Pea*?

Rosenthal: I guess with all three of my first published children's books—*Little Pea*, *Cookies*, and *One of Those Days*—they kind of came out as they are. *Little Pea* actually started as a story I told my daughter Paris at bedtime when she was three. She

said “Tell me a story” and I said “Oy” and the first thing that came to mind was this little green pea who wouldn’t eat his candy and I just kind of made it up as I went along. Then I thought: hmmm, this is kind of interesting, so I wrote it down. But that’s just one story that evolved that way out of the 500 or so I’ve told my kids that didn’t make any sense.

The follow up to *Little Pea*, however, called *Little Hoot*, took me a long time to develop and write because I couldn’t figure out what it would be. Finally it occurred to me that the sequel was not still about the pea character, but had to do with staying true to the inversion concept—about taking a child-related truth and turning it on its head. So, as it turned out, the book is about a happy little owl whose plight is to stay up late and play. He can’t go to bed early like all his friends. It’s simply twisting the bedtime thing the same way I twisted the pea and the candy but it took me a long time to come up with that idea, and to write the text for it. *Spoon*, another book, also took a lot of drafts. More often than not, the children’s books do take a lot of revising, but occasionally they come out whole.

Yelin: I know that you don’t belong to a writer’s group, but you spend time each week with your friend Charise, another artist, during which you each offer the other supportive feedback. Are you still doing this? Do you find this to be more beneficial than say, a writer’s group?

Rosenthal: Charise moved to New York, although we still try to talk on the phone every Thursday and send each other stuff to read. That dynamic hasn’t changed. In terms of a writing group, I think accomplishing things in a group is more difficult—whether you’re trying to write a book, or talk about a book, or even just having brunch with the girls. It doesn’t work as well for me. One-on-one is a more rewarding paradigm for me.

Yelin: I know you published four new children’s books in 2009, and you have another five scheduled for publication next year. You also have several gift-type items coming out next year—“The Grandparent Book” and “The Big Sibling Book”—and a film project in the works called the “Beckoning of Lovely,” the beginning of which can be seen on You Tube. Are you willing to share your secret to productivity?

Rosenthal: I’m not a procrastinator. I have a fair amount of energy, and I’m not by nature low energy or listless or have this or that issue working against me. I guess some of it’s just genetic. It probably helps that I have a set schedule too. If I had all the time in the world, I’d probably get a lot less done. But I have a certain amount of time everyday and I try to use it wisely.

It’s not that different from anybody else who works a full time job, really. The difference is: a doctor doesn’t line up all his patients at the end of the year and say, “Look at all these people I’ve treated” and people then say, “Wow, you’ve treated all these people?” But in this profession, you get to line your stuff up. I’m not trying to be self-deprecating; I understand that there’s a certain amount of material here that I’m producing that could be categorized as prolific. But perhaps it’s not that different from someone who writes one huge novel in a year. My stuff is just broken up into different categories.

Yelin: On top of everything else you are doing, you are also the host of a radio program called “Writer’s Block Party” on WBEZ Chicago Public Radio. Can you tell me what that’s all about?

Rosenthal: Several years ago I got this idea that I wanted to produce an audio magazine—basically NPR meets literary magazine. At first I tried to do it as a CD. I sought out a cross section of talent from all over the country that included writers, poets, and musicians. It was a huge undertaking, and I had big dreams about what it was going to be. The end result, however, was that I was trying to invent a genre that didn’t exist, and it didn’t work, at least not as a CD. Fortunately, I had been contributing to Chicago Public Radio’s newsmagazine *Eight-forty-eight* for a while so I went to them with the concept and said, “What do you think about doing this on the radio?” They liked the idea, so we put together this little show which is now “Writer’s Block Party.” It’s made up of mostly Chicago-based talent and it airs intermittently—basically whenever I can get my act together. We’ve done about thirty shows in the last few years. I have to love the stuff to get motivated, like when I find a writer that I’m jazzed about, or hear a new band, or meet some talented little kid like this one kid who was a savant and he was into show tunes, and he was this most amazing kid. It’s that kind of specialness that makes up a show.

Yelin: How does “Block Party” feed your creative life?

Rosenthal: What it feeds really is my quirk. If I really love something, I feel like I need to connect with that thing or that person. It's like the letter writing to authors that we talked about earlier. In the case of "Block Party," I want to take all these talented people and put them in a jar on my desk and just look at them. Through the show, I'm satisfying that need and sharing what I love with the world.

Yelin: Just for fun: If they ever turn *EOAOL* into a movie, who would you want to play your husband?

Rosenthal: On a good day, some people think Jason looks like George Clooney. Once there was a picture of Clooney in the paper and my daughter actually said, "Look Mom, Dad is in the paper!" And I said "No, honey, that's George Clooney."

Yelin: And your part?

Rosenthal: It would be cool to have some undiscovered person whose name also happened to be Amy Rosenthal.

Yelin: Didn't you find two other Amy Rosenthals for something having to do with your book?

Rosenthal: I did! They lived in New York City so I had them go and thank my editor with flowers and candy!

I imagine there's also got to be some undiscovered acting talent named Amy Rosenthal. I'd like that. Amy Rosenthal played by Amy Rosenthal. No relation.