

August 15, 2017 - Tamara Shopsin is an illustrator, graphic designer, writer, and part-time cook in her family's New York restaurant. She has published two memoirs, *Mumbai New York Scranton* (2013) and most recently, *Arbitrary Stupid Goal* (2017).

As told to Laurel Schwulst, 1029 words.

Tags: Writing, Design, Art, Process, Success.



Tamara Shopsin on the importance of publicity for books

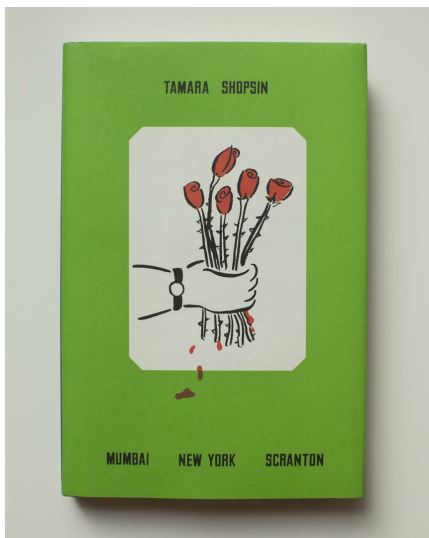
First, I have a very specific question. On your website, you position your four different roles: "author, designer, illustrator, cook" around a rectangle, one role per side. I noticed "cook" earned the upside-down position. Why?

This is because cooking is probably the least creative part of what I do. When I cook, it's muscle memory. It doesn't involve any brainstorming. I don't make the recipes, my dad does. There is some bit of creativity in the way I interpret my dad's recipes, but mostly I am trying to cook as good as my dad would.

You just published your second book, *Arbitrary Stupid Goal*. It focuses on your family's store and restaurant, *The Store*, and your dad Kenny Shopsin, who is behind its central personality and philosophy. Your dad has a very specific view on press. Can you tell me more?

I was raised to think that press was poisonous. Press would bring customers he didn't like into *The Store*. My dad was all about loving the customers and having the right kind of person: a person who is not just taking but giving and adding to the community.

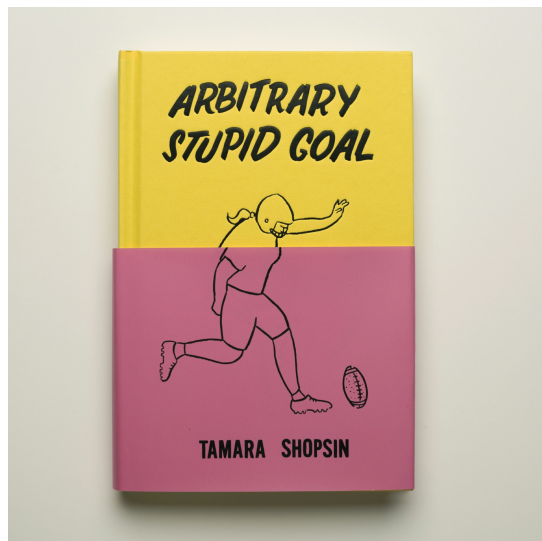
As I've grown up, it's gotten less poisonous. The response to my dad's cookbook, *Eat Me*, has been great. The customers that come in because of that book are lovely human beings. Thankfully we get these people regularly. I can think of no bad customers who have come in who have said, "Oh, I love that cookbook."



Tamara's first book, *Mumbai New York Scranton*, 2013.

With my first book, I had a really hard time with the press thing. It felt anti-me. I did it, but it was like dragging my feet, gritting my teeth. It felt wrong. I have a huge amount of guilt that I didn't do enough for that book. I didn't "bring it."

I realized that because publishing is having a very difficult time, if you're an author, you owe it to your publisher to do this final third leg. First you make the book, then you edit the book, and finally there's PR for the book: it's important.



Tamara's second book, *Arbitrary Stupid Goal*, 2017.

For my second book, I figured out a way the PR didn't make me feel weird. I made it my own. I created stupid little trailer videos, I made hand lettered fliers, and my husband Jason agreed to do a surprise slideshow at each event. Everything I did was in hope that the press would feel uniquely me; when someone responds to it, hopefully it's similar to how the *Eat Me* book worked with my dad.

Actually, the journalists I've met with have been so nice. I would hang out with them.

I think I'm just lucky. I've had a lot of luck this time around.

How did the tour go?

It was a mini tour. It started in New York. I have a very kind editor who only sent me to the places where I knew people: San Francisco and Los Angeles. I'm a very shy public speaker, so I think my editor was protecting me. Or maybe nobody wanted me. *[laughs]* It went really well.

How was the process of writing this book different than your first?

This book is so different. *Mumbai New York Scranton* is written in a perfect chronological order—each short chapter equals one day.

Arbitrary Stupid Goal hopscotches through time. It sort of ends where it starts. I wanted it to be overwhelming the way New York is. And it ended up being that overwhelming to write. I'm thankful for my editor Sean McDonald.

But *Mumbai New York Scranton* was overwhelming in its own New York sized way too. And at the end of the day looking back the process wasn't that different.

I'm used to working on rush illustrations that get done in a day. These books were both total beasts.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

OP-ED WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15, 2007

A Math Lesson on College Loans

By Malinda May Kamin

THE Department of Education's new proposal for increasing student loans is a math lesson on college loans. It's a lesson that the federal government is not taking the right direction, for the department's plan to increase student loans is not a math lesson on college loans. It's a lesson that the federal government is not taking the right direction, for the department's plan to increase student loans is not a math lesson on college loans.

The government is a more efficient lender than banks.

It would save money and create jobs. The government is a more efficient lender than banks. It would save money and create jobs. The government is a more efficient lender than banks. It would save money and create jobs.

I Swear

Two new books examine the linguistics, neurology, sociology — and just plain fun — of cursing.

BY JOSH LAMBERT

EVERY PARENT HAS been there, or will be there soon: the moment when your 3-year-old says one of the magic words that can transform a PC parent into an ex. Or even an N.A. star at \$25,000 fine. How do you react? You can't protest, as 2010, that wishing a kid's mouth out with soap will make those words disappear. Lenny Bruce discovered the grandeur of these old bad words ages ago. And if you're a parent, you know that there's no evidence that exposure to profanity harms children. And he argues strenuously that there are better ways to deal with profanity than to suppress it, even though he acknowledges evidence that one type of profanity — slurs directed at people because of their race, ethnic and sexual identities — are necessarily harmful.

Bergen synthesizes some of his own and others' research clearly and cracks some pretty decent profane jokes, but entertaining and enlightening as he is, he inadvertently says a little of the joy and dirty words. When he wants to describe profanity as beneficial for something other than teaching neuroscience, he reports on studies showing that people can keep their hands cleaner in very cold water for longer if they should know words while they wait. This sounds plausible, but it's hardly what makes profanity so appealing or enjoyable.

Bergen's new book, "What the F? Profanity as the historical linguist Michael Adams, who has previously described what people not just to doing in general (which he calls the "proper party"), but also to the linguistic innovation brought by "Rudy the Vampire Slayer." His new book, "In Praise of Profanity," sets out to catalog the "many benefits — personal, social and aesthetic" of cursing a blue streak (and none of them are profanity's ability to increase your tolerance for swearing words).

Adams ranges widely, eventually from early modern English poetry to contemporary television, offering definitions, etymologies and theories of language development, all the while treating

why not substitute James Joyce, Maggie Nelson and "Hamilton"? Or Henry Miller, "Cave of Thorns" and Claudia Rankine's "Citizen?"

Adams rejects the stereotype of profanity as a refuge for "slippery or lazy" writers and speakers — he's right, it's not — but as a cultural critic, he's sometimes glibly of those faults himself. Of the comedian, Louis C.K., he writes, "He's not a dirty words per se, and about her because, that 'profanity' isn't part of this address."

Perhaps before making such pronouncements, Adams should have at least listened to her song "Diva," or read the first chapter of her memoir, "The Believer."

What Adams gets right is that we're living in "The Age of Profanity." It truly is a wonderful time to write and to publish books like his and Bergen's. There's not much risk, but one gets to feel brave and subversive for naming around how often words with abundant rhyme — shades of Bruce and Carlin, but without all the rage and exorcism. If Adams always wants to be passing himself on the back for being a genuine, low-died interrogator who is completely, 100 percent O.K. with cursing, well, that's the kind of thing you can get away with in the Age of Profanity.

This age won't talk of course, it argues products convincingly that the future of swearing in America belongs to slurs, because there are already the words judged most offensive, and they're the ones most likely to be punished these days by sports leagues, schools and others. But let's let that language about this transition from the "good dirty" list of sexual profanity to hate speech. Adams, meanwhile, leans a theme in which "nothing will be able, nothing profane and nothing taken."

Without quite intending it, both authors remind us that if there's still any exposure charge left to be found in as if books today, the parties who deserve our praise and gratitude are those who continue to create profanity: the court system and its confused decisions about "Testing ex-

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A selection of Tamara's illustrations for The New York Times from 2007, 2016, 2009, respectively.

I think *Arbitrary Stupid Goal* is also overwhelming in the way memory is overwhelming. It's organized non-linearly through fragments. Different things from different times are juxtaposed. You can't request your memories in a particular order like a meal. Memories are both stored and retrieved according to their own rules.

I also remember one time, when we were at a typography lecture, you said, "I need to be selective about what I remember. There's a lot of noise out there."

I don't remember saying that. But I believe it.

Even though I apparently said that, I don't think you can choose what you remember. For example, Jason sometimes sings this "Monchhichi song." I'm sure it's just taking up space in his brain. I love when he sings me this song. There's no reason for the Monchhichi song to be stuck in his brain, but I'm so glad it's there.

I wrote this book because there are many things I wanted to *remember* (personally) and many things I wanted *remembered* (by many people) about New York. I feel relieved, thinking, "Okay, that stuff is remembered. If I forget it, I can read it. And if somebody goes to Morton Street and thinks it's just a boring place, they can read my book and know it wasn't always a boring place."

I fear having so many memories in my brain that I can't find the one I want. I think that's my final memory answer.

You've said completing an illustration assignment feels like a solving puzzle or a riddle. Does writing feel like puzzle-solving too?

Right, completing an illustration feels like a solving a puzzle. But with writing, I think I'm creating puzzles for somebody else.

I love puzzles. Just for the record.

Tamara Shopsin recommends:

Obituary of Olive Yang

Plain Pleasures by Jane Bowles

Sesame seeds

Comedy of Julio Torres

2hoursaweek.org

Name

Tamara Shopsin

Vocation

Author, Illustrator, Designer, Cook

Fact

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Photo: Jason Fulford

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