

Q&A with Cory Martin, author of **LOVE SICK**.

**At what point did you decide you wanted to be a writer?**

Before I became a writer in any sense, I was an avid reader. I remember the first book I actually learned how to read - Dr. Seuss's *Are You My Mother?* To this day I can still feel that excitement when I read the words to my mom and she praised me for getting them right. From then on I read every book I could get my hands on. Eventually I learned to write and that started to transform from classroom assignments to my own explorations in writing. In high school, I frequently found ways to turn ordinary writing assignments into creative writing pieces. Junior year we had to write a piece about fate vs. free will and what that meant to us. While the other kids in my class wrote their straightforward opinions, I wrote my paper as a 'choose your own adventure' book. I compared fate and free will to these books and explained it by giving the reader the option on how to read my paper. It wasn't until college however that I really decided that I wanted to be a writer. When I first left my small town in Indiana to go to school in LA at the University of Southern California, my major was undecided. I'd looked at journalism and communications, but they didn't appeal to me that much. So I stayed undecided and I took a required GE class on writing papers and instead of writing mine as assigned I once again turned it into a creative writing piece. This time however the professor acknowledged my skills and then wondered if I'd ever considered majoring in Creative Writing. I hadn't. In fact, I didn't even know you could major in it. So I chose Creative Writing and I've never felt more sure of a decision since.

**Creative Writing classes mainly focus on short stories and poetry, how did you end up working in Hollywood?**

There's something about the draw of celebrity and fantasy that a shy Midwestern girl finds hard to resist – I mean growing up I wanted to go to school with Donna, Brenda and Kelly because life in 90210 looked perfect. But no, seriously, when you go to a school like USC that's known for producing some of the Hollywood greats, you kind of get sucked into it. Also, I thought making a living as a novelist would be too hard, and all you hear about in Los Angeles is writers selling scripts for a million dollars. So I devised a plan. I'd work in Hollywood so that I could make enough money to retire and write novels. Funny thing is, the first thing I ever got paid to write was a novel.

**You were fairly young the first time you got paid to write, what was that experience like?**

I was twenty-four when I wrote the first novelization of the television show *The OC*. It was crazy because I was also working as an assistant to Stephanie Savage, the producer behind *Gossip Girl*, *The OC*, *Astronaut Wives' Club* and others. I was basically working ten to twelve hours a day on the TV shows and movies she was producing and spending whatever extra time I could find to write the novel. I remember I got the assignment in December. I figured, since all I had ever read about writing novels was that it took writers years to write books, that I would have at least a year to write this one. Boy was I wrong. I turned in one chapter in mid-December. I thought Scholastic would send me some notes and I'd keep going from there. Instead, they called in January and asked if I could have the book done at the end of the month. I was flabbergasted. In my head I thought I was going to be the next

great American writer and I did not want to be rushed. I needed extra time. They gave me until the end of February. I got the work done and went on to write two more of those novels for Scholastic. Since then every other book I've written I've done in shorter and shorter amounts of time. The last book I wrote, *Yoga for Beginners*, I wrote in three weeks. My memoir, *Love Sick*, however? That's a whole other story.

### **Okay, so how long did it take you to write your memoir?**

Eight years. Now that doesn't mean that I sat at my computer every day for eight years straight and wrote the thing. In fact it was quite the opposite. I wrote in spurts. When I first came up with the idea for the memoir, I had just been diagnosed with MS and my mind was flooded with thoughts on how it would affect my life and I knew there had to be a story in there somewhere. So one month after that fateful day at the MS specialist's office I signed up for a memoir writing class at UCLA extension. I wasn't expecting much in terms of the instruction (yes, I still have a USC bias), all I wanted was for someone to give me assignments and hold me accountable to a few deadlines and give me some feedback on my writing. What I got was far more than that. Deanne Stillman, the instructor and an accomplished writer herself, gave us amazing prompts and assignments each week and those became the first fifty pages of the memoir. Well, the first fifty in the original version, but that's beside the point, because also in that class was a writer by the name of Chris Miller. He's one of the writers behind the movie *Animal House*. He wrote for the *Lampoon* and has his own memoir, *The Real Animal House*. Anyway, the only reason I bring this up is because after we had to read our first assignment aloud in class, Chris came to me afterwards and said. "You're really funny. You've got what it takes to do this." I was so flattered because I had never thought of myself as funny. In fact, if you meet me in real life I am quiet and am constantly rethinking what I say. But hearing that the man who helped create the iconic movie that is *Animal House* thought that I had something to offer as a writer was the first bit of encouragement I needed to keep going. From there the book got written in bursts of fifty pages and a thousand different rewrites. And that's why it took eight years.

### **How did you come up with the title?**

The original title was *M.S. to M-R-S*. It was a play on words, or letters shall I say. I came up with it when I was twenty-eight and all my friends were getting married around me. I thought my time would come soon and wouldn't it be clever if I wrote a book about MS and dating and eventually got married, thus turning the M.S. into an M-R-S in front of my name. Of course, years later when I realized this was not going to happen and making life choices based on trying to keep a title of a book was not the best way to go about life, I dropped that title and started searching for something new. I kept a little notes section going in my phone and whenever I had a title idea I would write it in there. For almost a year I did this and nothing was sticking. Then one day I was out for a walk and it hit me. *Love Sick*. It was the perfect play on words. A few days later I looked it up on urban dictionary and found this: "A deep often depressing feeling of wanting to find love. To be longing for love; to be without a companion to share one's life with, though it is desired deeply." And I knew I had made the right decision.

**A big part of the struggle you went through in dealing with MS was wondering when you should tell people or if you should tell at all. When did you tell people? And do you have any advice for others dealing with this?**

Honestly, up until about five months before *Love Sick* was about to come out I kept the MS a secret from most people. Except for my family and my close friends, no one knew. Then one day in October, 2015 I saw that Playboy announced that they were getting rid of nudes from their magazine. And I thought, *oh my gosh*, I have a story that would go perfect with this. There was a chapter that used to be in my book that talked about all the things I wanted to do with my body before it failed me. It was a bucket list of sorts, only I called it my wheelchair list. In this piece of writing I talked about the kinds of things that you would only fantasize about if you were dealing with the fact that one day soon you might end up in a wheelchair or lose control of your body. On that list was posing naked in Playboy. It was a tongue in cheek look at what happens when you face something like MS and you let your imagination run free. Anyway, I pitched the story to *XOJane*, the online women's magazine, and they liked it. Two days later that article ran. I posted it to my own Facebook and Instagram pages and watched the comments roll in. People from all stages of my life were commending me for my braveness, and that's when it occurred to me I wasn't just showing off another piece of my writing I had literally outed myself to all of my friends that I was dealing with MS. If you had told me years ago to go out and do that I would've thought you were nuts. I would've been scared out of my mind to post something so personal about something that I believed made me so ugly and unlovable. But posting it under the guise of my writing helped me to get over any fear I had of telling others about my disease, or publishing my memoir.

Now, I don't recommend to others who might be in my situation that they should go out and shout their health matters to the world, but if you have a story to tell or you believe others can relate then I think you should share it with them. This doesn't have to be so public either. It can be on a case-by-case basis. Think about who you're going to tell and why you're telling them. Is it because you want them to know that you understand a struggle they're facing? Is it because you need help or support? Or is it because you're beginning a relationship with them and you don't want to have secrets? Whatever the reason, make sure it is one that will be satisfied by you telling the person. Because I have learned from experience that if you tell the wrong people and you are not ready for their reaction it can be devastating.

**Your story, or life for that matter, has not been easy and yet you have such an optimistic and humorous approach to it. How do you do this?**

You know, I wish I could tell you, because if I could I would sell that idea in a heartbeat. I would make myself the next self-help guru and knock Tony Robbins on his feet. What I can tell you is that I am very lucky to have the family I have. My parents have been extremely supportive and they always made me feel like I could accomplish anything I wanted. But also, they kept me grounded. While I was a fairly good student growing up, I had a few bad grades on tests and assignments here and there. I remember the first time I brought a bad grade home. I was scared to death to show my parents. But when I finally mustered up the courage to give it to them, they laughed and hung the big F on the refrigerator. They wanted me to own what I had and not be ashamed. And that's the lesson: If you can't own your

shortcomings or your failures or the shit life deals you, and laugh through it all then life is going to be quite difficult. So now I own what I've got.

**Besides writing, yoga seems to be the one thing in your memoir that gives you respite from the disease. Can you talk about this?**

Ah, yoga. You would think I'd have come to it after getting the MS diagnosis as a way to stay healthy. But honestly, I found yoga a year prior. It was after a bad break up with a not so nice guy. Our relationship was extremely unhealthy, we ate like crap together and never worked out. I was probably in the worst shape of my life after that breakup. So I decided to make a change and again, own my shit and take responsibility for it. I signed up for a six-week transformation program at my local health spa. It included yoga, time with a nutritionist, another workout plan and acupuncture. It was amazing. I got back in shape and despite the fact that I had always thought yoga was weird and too soft for me, I became addicted to it. At first it was all about the physicality of the poses, being able to do crazy things with my body that I probably hadn't done since I was a kid on a jungle gym or in gymnastics class, but then it became about far more. It started to seep into other parts of my life and I started to feel so great, and when things started to get more serious with the testing and the doctor's ideas of what was actually wrong with my body, yoga was there to help me keep a sense of calm. Obviously, if you've read my book you know that it's become a far bigger part of my life, but I don't want to give anything away. Instead I want to leave you with this, yoga is not always about the poses, if you practice it often enough it becomes a way of life, and for me, nothing has ever rang more true.

**How do I reach you? Or better yet, how can I internet stalk you?**

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