THE WORLD'S STRONGEST LIBRARIAN

A MEMOIR OF TOURETTE'S, FAITH, STRENGTH, AND THE POWER OF FAMILY

JOSH HANAGARNE
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author Interview: Art of the Memoir by David Henry Sterry</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author bio</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The World’s Strongest Librarian Tells All” Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion Questions

1. Do you remember your first trip to the library? Do you read more or less now than you did as a child? Why?

2. Was there a book --- or a character in a book --- that infatuated you as much as CHARLOTTE’S WEB and Fern did Josh?

3. Why do you think boys like Javier are embarrassed by their interest in books? What might be done to change young people’s perception that books are uncool?

4. Could you relate to Josh’s story about sneaking Stephen King novels into the house after his mother banned them? Is it okay to let kids read whatever interests them or should parents impose boundaries?

5. Should Josh’s parents have taken him to specialists before the tics got as bad as they did during his high school years? Today’s parents are more likely than those from previous generations to have their kids’ “problems” diagnosed and treated. Is this a change for the better or worse?

6. Advances in DNA mapping are making it increasingly possible to screen for disorders like Tourette’s. If you were at risk for passing down a non-fatal but challenging genetic condition to your child, would you want to know before he or she was born?

7. It seems unfair that Josh and Janette’s application to adopt was turned down. How might the screening process be improved?

8. Do you strength train or practice some form of exercise? Do you find that your body’s fitness affects your brain’s fitness?

9. When was the last time you went to a library and what was your reason for going? When was the last time you looked something up using the Dewey Decimal System?

10. A recent Wall Street Journal article profiled libraries that have expanded their offerings to include a hog-butcher demonstration, Wii bowling, and Star Wars days. Do you agree or disagree with the notion that “libraries must stay ‘relevant’” (p. 213) in an increasingly electronic age?

11. Does Josh’s success managing his tics inspire you to tackle a challenge of your own?

Art of the Memoir: Josh Hanagarne, the World's Strongest Librarian, on Tourette Syndrome, Choosing Stories and Being Strong at the Library
By David Henry Sterry, 10/23/2013

To commemorate the publication of the 10-year anniversary edition of my memoir, Chicken Self:-Portrait of a Man for Rent, I'm doing a series of interviews with memoirists I admire. I've read lots of great things about the world's strongest librarian, so I thought I'd track him down and see what he has to say about writing, memoirs, and being strong at the library.

Why in god's name did you decide to write a memoir?

I didn't do it in god's name, but here's an answer: I've always liked to write, but I wasn't trying to become a writer. I had started a blog called World's Strongest Librarian, just for fun. I was writing about Tourette Syndrome, strength training, books, and a few other things, and there were a few readers (friends and family). Two months in, the author Seth Godin wrote me an email and said, "You should be writing a book! I'm sending your blog to my agent!" Forty-eight hours later, I had a literary agent for no reason, and when she said "So what's the book?" I said, "What book?" And that's how it started.

What were the worst things about writing your memoir?
Spending a lot of time thinking about parts of myself that I don't like. You really get to know yourself when you write a memoir. When you start turning over those rocks, you don't get to choose what you find underneath them.

**What were the best things about writing your memoir?**

Making myself laugh every time I sat down to write. Paying tribute to things I love. Honoring the people who have helped me have the life I have.

**Did writing your memoir help you make some order out of the chaos we call life?**

Nope. If anything, it made me throw up my hands and say "It all really is chaos."

**How did you make a narrative out of the seemingly random events that happened to you?**

A memoir is not a life, it's an aspect of a life. The stories are the illustrations of themes. Once you decide which themes you're trying to illustrate, choosing stories becomes much easier.

**How was the process of selling your memoir?**

Long! It took three proposals. The first two went nowhere and took almost four years. The third proposal was the one that sold and it got picked up immediately. By that time I had figured out what the book would be and it was an easy sell.

**How did you go about promoting and marketing your memoir?**

My primary driver is speaking. I still work at the library, but I'm giving over twenty talks in October alone. I blog. I'm on Twitter.

**Did you have difficulty speaking in public about the intimate aspects of your memoir?**

No. Speaking is what I enjoy most, and it's by far what I'm the best at.

**How did your family, friends and loved ones react to your memoir?**

With incredible support. Although my mom says that I made her out to be way nicer than she actually is. She's wrong.

**I hate to ask you this, but you have any advice for people who want to write a memoir?**

Yep. Two things.
Write. No matter what you’re doing, if words aren’t appearing on the page, you’re not writing yet. Don’t worry about people’s reactions during the first draft. Just get it down.

Read The Memoir Project by Marion Roach Smith. It was the last book about writing memoir that I’ll ever read. And it’s short, if that tells you anything about Marion’s approach.

David Henry Sterry is the author of 16 books, a performer, muckraker, educator, activist, and book doctor. His new book Chicken Self:-Portrait of a Man for Rent, 10 Year Anniversary Edition, has been translated into 10 languages. He's also written Hos, Hookers, Call Girls and Rent Boys: Professionals Writing on Life, Love, Money and Sex, which appeared on the front cover of the Sunday New York Times Book Review. He is a finalist for the Henry Miller Award. He has appeared on, acted with, written for, been employed as, worked and/or presented at: Will Smith, a marriage counselor, Disney screenwriter, Stanford University, National Public Radio, Milton Berle, Huffington Post, a sodajerk, Michael Caine, the Taco Bell chihuahua, Penthouse, the London Times, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, a human guinea pig and Zippy the Chimp. He can be found at www.davidhenrysterry.com.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-henry-sterry/art-of-the-memoir_b_4144191.html
Josh Hanagarne
Author of the memoir, The World's Strongest Librarian

Biography

Josh Hanagarne believes in curiosity, questions, and strength, and that things are never so bad that they can't improve.

At first glance, Josh seems an improbable librarian. He stands 6’7”, competes in strongman contests, and was diagnosed in high school with Tourette Syndrome. But books were his first love: Josh's earliest memories involve fantastic adventures between the pages of Gulliver's Travels and a passionate infatuation with Fern from Charlotte's Web. Everything in Josh's life--from his Mormon upbringing to finally finding love to learning to control his tics through lifting--circles back to a close connection to books. His upcoming book, The World's Strongest Librarian, illuminates the mysteries of Tourette Syndrome as well as the very different worlds of strongman training and modern libraries.

Currently, Josh is a librarian at the Salt Lake City Public Library and lives with his wife, Janette, and their son, Max, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

http://www.penguinspeakersbureau.com/speakers/page/josh_hanagarne
“The World’s Strongest Librarian” Tells All

Posted by Jon Michaud
May 1, 2013

Few professions are as bedevilled by stereotypes as librarianship. Even in this digital age, when many librarians are busy rebranding themselves as “information scientists” and “knowledge managers,” an inaccurate image of the archetypal librarian persists in popular culture: a petite, humorless woman (always a woman) dressed in dowdy clothes, spectacles on her face, hair knotted in a bun, the radio of her Prius or Civic tuned to NPR, and a cat waiting for her at home. From My Morning Jacket’s “Librarian” (“Take off those glasses and let down your hair for me…”) to the Nancy Pearl Librarian Action Figure (“With Amazing Push-Button Shushing Action!”), this notion of the person behind the reference desk is as enduring as the pocket-protector-wearing accountant who does your taxes or the absent-minded professor spilling coffee on his jotter of equations.

One of the pleasures of Josh Hanagarne’s new memoir, “The World’s Strongest Librarian,” is the way it destroys this stereotype. Hanagarne, who works at the Salt Lake City Public Library, is six-feet-seven-inches tall and weighs two hundred and sixty pounds. He was raised as a Mormon, has extreme Tourette’s Syndrome (or Tourette Syndrome, as he calls it), and in his spare time trains for strongman competitions. The author photo in the back of his book indicates that his hair is too short to fit in a bun. Perhaps the only trait he shares with the received idea of his chosen profession is a love of reading and knowledge. “Like most librarians, I’m not well suited to anything else,” he writes. “As a breed, we’re the ultimate generalists. I’ll never know everything about anything, but I’ll know something about almost everything.”

Hanagarne’s book alternates between short, often funny dispatches from his day job and longer autobiographical passages. His parents, both large people, met at a fittingly unconventional place: a uranium mine in Moab, Utah. His mother was a devout Mormon; Hanagarne’s father converted in order to marry her. Throughout the book, Hanagarne gets terrific comic mileage out of the disparity between his parents’ devotion to the L.D.S. Church. “My dad was faithful enough that my mom wouldn’t regret marrying, but … his priorities swung more toward naps than pious service.” At one point, Hanagarne’s father memorably summarizes Mormon theology as “This is the church of Don’t Be a Dick.”
Raised in Moab and Elko, Nevada, Hanagarne identifies two watershed moments in his childhood. The first was reading E. B. White’s “Charlotte’s Web” and falling in love with the book’s heroine. “My life was divided by a lightning strike into two distinct chapters: Before Fern and After Fern.” (Later, Ramona Quimby would unseat Fern as his major crush.) The second came when he was six. Cast as a tree in the first-grade Thanksgiving play, Hanagarne endured the earliest manifestation of his Tourette’s. “Under the bright lights, my nose, eyes, lips, and tongue contorted as if they’d seceded from my face and were involved in a game of one-upmanship…. Not only did my tics last the entire performance, they got worse the longer I was onstage.”

To help cope with the condition, Hanagarne gave it a name: Misty (short for Miss Tourette’s). He sought numerous treatments, visiting quacks and ingesting drugs—Klonopin, Risperol, Haldol, Clonidine—that dulled his mind. For a time, he even endured regular injections of botulism toxin, which paralyzed his vocal cords and muted his yelps and shouts. Though silenced, his Tourette’s manifested itself in other ways. The book repeatedly gives the reader a visceral sense of what Tourette’s feels like.

While it was true that I could no longer scream, and being in public was easier, I finally had verification of something I had long suspected—there was a daily intensity quota that had to be met. I had to expend a certain amount of energy on tics each day. It could be meted out over many small tics, or a few dozen huge ones. So even though I wasn’t screaming, my body was still trying: it just couldn’t make the noise. If I couldn’t be noisy, I could still be an abomination of motor skills gone amok.

Plainspoken and direct, Hanagarne details the ways in which his condition, coupled with a Mormon upbringing, multiplied the myriad embarrassments and miseries of adolescence. Tall for his age, Hanagarne played for his high-school basketball team. During a game at another school’s gym, spectators in the crowd chanted “Tic, tic, tic!” when Hanagarne was at the free-throw line. He also didn’t have much luck with girls. “Two things kept getting in the way … God and Tourette’s.” Sent to Washington, D.C., for missionary service at the age of eighteen, Hanagarne suffered a crisis of faith that coincided with a severe manifestation of his condition. In a scene that would not be credible in a novel, Hanagarne punched himself in the face while walking down a street in the nation’s capital, holding a copy of the Book of Mormon in his other hand. That self-injury began a disastrous period of weight loss and doubt. Losing control of his body and his faith, he was sent home early from his missionary assignment and entered a long period of depression.

From that nadir, Hanagarne slowly rebuilt his life. He met his future wife, Janette, attended college classes, and, at his father’s suggestion, began lifting weights. Weightlifting, he discovered, helped with the Tourette’s. But there were many challenges. Unable to conceive a child, he and Janette applied for adoption through the church and were rejected as unsuitable. Hanagarne believes that his enthusiastic endorsement of Stephen King’s work during their adoption interview was partly to blame. Though he attended classes, he often had to drop out because of his Tourette’s. Desperate, Hanagarne turned to a regimen of strength training centered on the kettlebell (“essentially a cannonball with a handle”). He sold his complete set of the Oxford Mark Twain to help defray the cost of attending the Russian Kettlebell Challenge, a three-day certification event. “Progress in strength training gave me control over the rest of my life,” Hanagarne writes. Eventually, he sought out the strongman Adam T. Glass, a former Air Force tech sergeant who lives in North Dakota and has all sixteen lines of William Henley’s
poem “Invictus” tattooed on his arm. Under Glass’s tutelage, Hanagarne developed a breathing and training regimen that allowed him to control his Tourette’s much of the time.

Hanagarne still works out in the fitness room in the basement of the Salt Lake City Library. He chose librarianship, he says, not just because of his love of books and knowledge but also because a library was one of the most inhospitable places he could think of for someone with Tourette’s. It’s an admirable and revealing choice. “Silence and stillness were in short supply in my life. There were only three times when I could count on them: when I slept, when I read, and apparently when I blasphemed,” Hanagarne writes. His relationship with the L.D.S. Church has remained ambivalent, even as he acknowledges the benefits it has brought to members of his family. In a memorable passage that exemplifies his ambivalence, Hanagarne considers whether religion should be classified under fiction or non-fiction in a library.

At one time during his depression, Hanagarne lied to his co-workers at Barnes & Noble, telling them that he had an agent and a book deal with a publisher in New York. His colleagues surprised him by putting up a congratulatory banner in the store. Time has turned Hanagarne’s lie into truth, and he deserves a banner now, for writing such a fearless and funny memoir.

http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/05/a-strongman-in-the-library.html