

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Amy Dickinson is author of the New York Times bestselling memoir, *The Mighty Queens of Freeville: A Story of Surprising Second Chances* a chronicle of her experiences and misadventures as a single mother to her daughter, Emily.

She writes the syndicated advice column, “Ask Amy,” which is carried in over 150 newspapers and read by an estimated 22 million readers daily.

Dickinson is known not only for her wisdom but her wit. Since 2006, she has been a featured panelist on National Public Radio’s comedy quiz show, “Wait Wait, Don’t Tell Me.” She is also a sought-after speaker, delivering her inspiring and comic stories of her adventures and misadventures to groups around the country.

Dickinson was born and raised on a dairy farm in tiny Freeville, New York, (pop. 454) on land her family has lived on since the Revolutionary War. She is a graduate of Georgetown University.

After living in New York, London, Washington DC and Chicago, she moved back to her hometown, married a local contractor she had known since childhood, and is now mother to five daughters.

- Author’s website

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author writes, “All roads lead back to my hometown.” Why did Amy Dickinson go home again as an adult? What do you think she expected to find? What does “going home” mean to you?
2. Amy writes from the heart, by honestly sharing her childhood joys and disappointments. What qualities resonate with you?
3. The book contains many second chance stories – both the author’s own and those of the other women in her life. Who in your discussion group has a second chance story to share? What can you ascertain from this real-life experience?
4. “Marriage was just an assumption I had made about my life and I couldn’t simply undo it,” (page 17). Do you think most women assume that they are destined for marriage and motherhood, and that they don’t have

options beyond either role? How does this apply to you?

5. What were some of the good things to come out of Dickinson's role as single mom? What challenges are unique to these women? How did the author meet, or sidestep, these tests? Dickinson has a complicated reaction to her role as a parent. Do you think she did a good job?
6. "I knew I was destined to live in New York City," (page 69). Did you decide your future at a young age? What were you determined to do when you got older? Did you amend your plans? Remember, we can't go backwards, only forward.
7. What did you think of the Mighty Queens in Dickinson's family? What did they teach her? Who are the Mighty Queens in your life? What have you learned from them?
8. "We are not our best intentions. We are what we do. My husband taught me that," (page 46). What do you think this statement means? Do you agree with its sentiment?
9. Amy writes her story using a conversational style, as if she is having a cup of tea with the reader. What was your favorite part of the book?
10. Dickinson entitles Chapter 7 "Failing Up." What does this phrase mean in context of the author? What are examples of the author's "upward failings?" What can we learn from Amy's experience?
11. "To me, the two hardest questions to answer have always been, 'Who am I?' and 'What do I want?'" (Page 125). Have you ever asked yourself these questions? How would you answer them today?
12. Discuss this statement from the introduction: "In my family, the women tend to do all the heavy lifting while the men --- well, the men are nice and fine and they love us for a time. Then at some point, it seems they tire of their indeterminate role in our lives, so they wage a campaign of passive resistance, and then they leave." How is this true for Dickinson and some of her female relatives? Do you think it's a self-fulfilling prophesy?
13. Ask yourself: what advice would you give an advice columnist? What's the best advice you ever received from a friend, a relative, or your book club friends?
14. Amy's memoir shares the power of home to help heal. The women in her family emerge as strong, unique characters. Who are the women, or men, in your family who left an indelible positive mark on your life? Why?
15. *The Mighty Queens of Freeville* is set in a small upstate New York town, but it could be any town. What felt most familiar to you? Could you imagine walking the town streets? If you could drive to Freeville right now, where would you go?

16. One of the most powerful themes of the memoir is growth; how does Amy grow? How does her relationship with her daughter change and grow? Can you relate to the multi-generational influence of strength of character? If your family had a motto, what would it be?

- <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-mighty-queens-of-freeville-a-story-of-surprising-second-chances/guide>

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

### Booklist

When Ann Landers retired as the reigning doyenne of advice-column divas, the Chicago Tribune conducted a nationwide search for her successor, ultimately selecting a relatively unknown NPR contributor and Time magazine columnist. Young and savvy, Dickinson belied the image of a bespectacled matron dispensing timeworn homilies and adages. Offering pithy, no-nonsense counsel, Dickinson quickly charmed legions of fans with her unabashed candor, tension-diffusing wit, and astute reasoning. How this fortysomething single mother came by such wisdom and practicality is lovingly explored in Dickinson's joyous memoir, an unabashed homage to the notable women who raised her, unassuming small town that nurtured her, and soul-mate daughter who sustained her through the emotional minefields of divorce, single parenthood, and career uncertainty. Though the Dickinson women might have been unlucky in romantic love, their marital misfortune only served to strengthen their innate resolve and unwavering commitment to family. Buoyant and bright, Dickinson offers a refreshingly open and sincere tribute to life's most important relationships.

### Publisher's Weekly

"I didn't become an advice columnist on purpose," writes Dickinson (author of the syndicated column "Ask Amy") in her chapter titled "Failing Up." In the summertime of 2002, after spending months living off of her credit cards between freelance writing jobs, Dickinson sent in an audition column to the Chicago Tribune and became the paper's replacement for the late Ann Landers. Here, Dickinson traces her own personal history, as well as the history of her mother's family whose members make up the "Mighty Queens" of Freeville, N.Y., the small town where Dickinson was raised, and where she raised her own daughter between stints in London; New York City; Washington, D.C.; and Chicago. Dickinson writes with an honesty that is at once folksy and intelligent and brings to life all of the struggles of raising a child (Dickinson was a single mother) and the challenges and rewards of having a supportive extended family. "I'm surrounded by people who are not impressed with me," Dickinson humorously laments. "They don't care that my syndicated column has twenty-two million readers." Dickinson's irresistible memoir reads like a letter from an upbeat best friend. (Feb.)

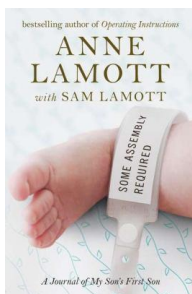
### Kirkus Reviews

In a gutsy debut memoir about family, resolve and the secret of survival, farm girl turned advice columnist Dickinson plows to the root of her down-to-earth American know-how. The straight-shooting successor to Ann Landers, Dickinson's previous claims to fame include the community auction of household possessions to square a debt accrued by her absent father, teaching Sunday school, harboring Holsteins and mastering single motherhood. In the late 1980s, Dickinson's adulterous, soon-to-be-ex-husband walked out on her, and she recoiled to her banal hometown of Freeville, N.Y., with toddler daughter Emily. Dejected, fond of therapeutic

cigarette smoking in the tub, she was steadily buttressed by patient pillars of female kin and finally traded the bathroom for a fresh start in Washington, D.C. Like a quarterback reacting to a testy defensive line, she called snap plays for first dates, odd jobs, solo parenting, disastrous home repairs and pet surgery. Hectic yet reflective, Dickinson's mind constantly searched for life lessons in her mistakes while pondering how to present these aberrations as worldly insights to her daughter—a thought process which now endears 22 million readers daily to her column, "Ask Amy." Real-life situations were forever testing her, from damage control after a high-school choir accident to the humiliating Laura Ingalls Wilder Halloween costume. Regardless, Dickinson's crisis-filled playbook had two constants: candor and Freeville coaching. No fumble was without its rewards according to Freeville women, portrayed here as resilient blends of Marmee March and Calamity Jane. An unabashed, self-pity-free, landmine-filled love letter to a rocky past, credited for the author's current success and happiness. Author tour to Boston, Charlotte, N.C., Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton, Ohio, New Orleans, New York, Raleigh, N.C., San Francisco, St. Louis, Washington, D.C. Agent: Elyse Cheney/Elyse Cheney Literary Associates Copyright Kirkus 2009 Kirkus/BPI Communications.

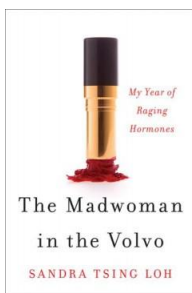
## READALIKES

---



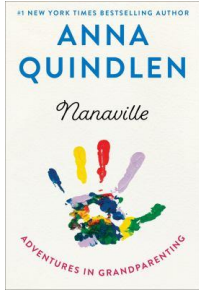
### ***Some Assembly Required: A Journal of My Son's First Son* by Anne Lamott**

In *Some Assembly Required*, Anne Lamott enters a new and unexpected chapter in her own life: grandmotherhood. Stunned to learn that her son, Sam, is about to become a father at nineteen, Lamott begins a journal about the first year of her grandson Jax's life. In careful and often hilarious detail, Lamott and Sam--about whom she first wrote so movingly in *Operating Instructions*--struggle to balance their changing roles. By turns poignant and funny, honest and touching, *Some Assembly Required* is the true story of how the birth of a baby changes a family--as this book will change everyone who reads it.



### ***The Madwoman in the Volvo* by Sandra Tsing Loh**

A writer, performer and contributing editor to *The Atlantic* humorously chronicles her experiences going through menopause while dealing with the end of her marriage, her preteen daughters and the hijinks of her 89-year-old dad.



### ***Nanaville* by Anna Quindlen**

Before mommy blogs were even invented, Anna Quindlen became a go-to writer on the joys and challenges of motherhood in her nationally syndicated column. Now she's taking the next step and going full Nana in the pages of this lively and moving book about her grandchildren, her children, and her new and remarkable role.