

Q&A — Hays Trott Blinckmann on *Tiny Little Earthquakes*

1. What inspired *Tiny Little Earthquakes*?

Answer:

My childhood. I grew up surrounded by people who had it all from the outside and were falling apart behind closed doors. I wanted to capture that duality — how families can be both beautiful and brutal. We had money, privilege, and education available to us, but we were still a hot mess. I wanted to shine a light on a certain segment of society- white, privileged, but completely dysfunctional.

2. The title is powerful — why *Tiny Little Earthquakes*?

Answer:

Because not every disaster is a big one. Sometimes it's the small cracks — the everyday heartbreaks, the seemingly insignificant choices— that end up changing everything. It was always hard to explain to people the overall pain in my family because there were so many small tragedies that compounded and affected us. As I wrote, those are the tiny earthquakes that shape us.

3. Elliot's mother is both monstrous and heartbreaking. Was she based on anyone real?

Answer:

My mother was an amazing woman for many reasons - and not all good. The fictionalized version allows me to see compassion in my real mother's faults. Her life was shaped by her parents' mistakes, not just her own, and also the time she was born into- the expectations placed on her. I think every reader can recognize someone in her — that person who's both the wound and the reason you learned to heal. I wouldn't be here, with a life and a love without the exact mother I had. So I am exposing her while also paying tribute. Mom would have hated and loved this book.

4. The novel deals with addiction, trauma, and family dysfunction — yet it's darkly funny. How do you balance that tone?

Answer:

Because that's how we survived without going insane. When you grow up in chaos, humor becomes armor. It's the only way to keep breathing. I wanted readers to laugh in the middle of the pain — because that's real life. My family joked, even when everything was on fire. Never

invite my sister and me to a funeral- oh wait, we weren't invited to our father's!! (That's a joke, but also a true story!)

5. The book spans multiple settings — Martha's Vineyard, Cincinnati, and a boarding school — how do these places reflect Elliot's emotional state?

Answer:

Each place shapes Elliot in one way or another. Cincinnati was her mother/family's past that she kept having to return to- and figure out her place in it. North Carolina was a wild, isolated, barbaric farm where she learned survival skills. Connecticut showed her a gateway to her future with friends and education. Boarding school- more survival skills, but also how she could make it on her own. Martha's Vineyard, that no place is paradise, that her family could ruin anything.

6. What do you hope readers take away from Elliot's journey?

Answer:

That survival doesn't always look graceful. Sometimes it's messy, sarcastic, and takes years. But you can come from a broken place and still build something worthy for yourself. Also, it's pretty pointless trying to act "normal" or comparing yourself to others- because everyone, EVERYONE, has a story.

7. What was the hardest scene for you to write?

Answer:

The scene where Elliot finds her mother after the suicide attempt. It's the emotional core of the book — that moment when love and fear and exhaustion all collapse into one. Writing it was getting to the heart of my own very deep trauma, and I had to get it right- in order, mostly for myself to de-stigmatize it. I had to take the weight of it off my own back. Also, the scene at the end when Elliot confronts her mother and has to separate herself from her actively. That was a lifelong battle for me.

8. Your writing has been described as brutally honest. Do you ever feel exposed putting that much truth on the page?

Answer:

Well, both my parents have passed now, so I got a get-out-of-jail card. But no, not anymore. I did for a long time, but with each book I've written, I've let go of more and more. I've gotten older, and I don't want to carry this story around anymore. And honestly, it's been the response of my readers- the more honest I was, the more they connected with me. And frankly, that feels pretty good. Like we are all in group therapy. Hi, my name is Hays! Welcome, Hays!

9. You've called this book "95% autobiographical." How do you protect the people in your life while telling your truth?

Answer:

You don't, really. You protect the *story because it's my story—not theirs*. I changed names, the timing of certain events, and details, but the emotional truth stays intact. My job isn't to expose anyone — it's to illuminate real human responses to certain situations. Also, I protected them for decades, and we have grown up now, so it's not my job anymore. *Gird your loins*, people.

10. Last one — if *Tiny Little Earthquakes* had a soundtrack, what's on it?

Answer:

Omg that's- a big one. I make so many cultural references in Tiny Little Earthquakes because I wanted my Gen X'er fans to really remember those markers in our childhood. I name TV shows, movies, cultural trends, political events, and music because I want the reader to go back and be there, especially with music, which -unless you are dead inside- for us 80s kids means an entire anthology.

My publicist told me to put together a Spotify list. So imagine movie maker John Hughes popping a gummy and making a set list. From Bob Dylan to Yaz - there you go.