



Q&A with Amy Ewing
author of
THE PLUS-ONE LIST

*Q. In your new novel, **THE PLUS-ONE LIST**, we meet Eloise – a woman who struggles with anxiety and strongly prefers the company of her senior rescue dogs to people. When her best friend, Rachel, announces her destination wedding in which everyone must bring a date, the pressure is on. Using an exclusive “plus-one list,” Eloise winds up with Agustín, a charming journalist and immigrant who recently moved to New York City from Mexico. Amy, you have written an absolutely swoon-worthy, dazzling novel. I savored every page! How did you come up with the idea of the Plus-One list? Is it a real thing?*

A. It actually is! I was at a party a few years ago and chatting with a woman when somehow the subject of weddings came up—she told me about how her friends have a list of potential plus-ones that they circulate if anyone needs a recommendation for a wedding date, complete with tidbits of information about the guys. Immediately I thought, “That needs to be in a romance book.” I asked her if she’d mind if I used it someday and she very kindly agreed—and even sent me the list to look at! Though of course, I made my own list for the book.

This concept sat in the back of my mind for a while, because I had no idea how exactly to implement it, and in what kind of story with what kinds of characters. But as I began thinking about my next romance, there were various elements I had in my mind that I wanted to use. I knew I wanted to write a book about a woman with anxiety, an immigrant hero, highlight senior dog rescue, and use the settings of New York and Mexico City. But how to bring them all together? What was the thread connecting them all? And then it hit me: the plus-one list!

Q. Eloise and Agustín give us no choice but to fall head over heels for them. It's so magical to see their romantic feelings unfurl, and it feels deeply personal. How is this story rooted in your own life?

A. During the course of writing this story, I actually got engaged—to an immigrant from Mexico City, a man who worked so hard to move to this country and achieve his dreams. I couldn't be prouder of him, or more excited to spend the rest of my life with him. So, it was really quite fun and a unique experience to feel my own life reflected in this book in a more personal way than usual when I'm writing.

Q. Oh wow! What was it like to write about a wedding at the same time you were planning your own?

A. It got me very excited to get married, that's for sure! Though our wedding won't be nearly as lavish as Rachel's, thank god—I can't imagine the stress she must have been going through. But it was so fun to track the progress of picking out a dress (or in my case, a jumpsuit) with my best friend, celebrating with an engagement party, and organizing my bachelorette, all while writing about these same things.

*Q. In **THE PLUS-ONE LIST** the wedding takes place in Mexico City, and you can feel the love that you have for this mesmerizing destination. What are some of the things you adore most of all about this city?*

A. Oh my goodness, how much time do we have? But in all seriousness, Mexico City is truly one of the most incredible, singular places in the world, in my opinion. The food! The architecture! The culture! The history! But probably for me the best part about Mexico City is the people. Especially the network of friends who have become like family to me—when you blend your life together with someone else's, there's always that blend of community as well. I am deeply grateful to have so many amazing people in my life. It really makes every trip to Mexico City feel like coming home. How lucky am I, to have two homes?

Q. New York clearly holds a special place in your heart, as well. Your descriptions of life in Manhattan are so vivid. Tell us why you chose New York City as the perfect place for Eloise and Agustín's relationship to grow into something more than merely transactional?

A. I moved to New York in 2000, to study theater at NYU, and while that career path clearly did not work out for me, I knew I was going to live in this city for the long haul. There really is no place like New York. It's just so full of...well, everything! Culture, music, theater, art, every kind of food, people from all over the world, all living together like one big messy family. It's the very definition of a melting pot, and it felt like the exact right place for Eloise and Agustín to meet.

Q. It's hard not to love Agustín from the get-go. He's so devoted to his family, and he's considerate and kind with Eloise. How is he different from the typical male love interest, and why did you feel it was important to write about a man with these particular values?

A. It didn't even occur to me as I was writing him until my editor said in one of her notes: Oh my god, I love him, he's such a cinnamon roll! And he is—love that there is an actual term in the romance world for the exact kind of man you described in your question. Someone kind, and considerate, and thoughtful, and the opposite of toxic masculinity. Not only was it important to me to show that kind of man on the page, but it was the only sort of man Eloise would ever even give an inch to. She would never let down her walls for anything less.

Q. Eloise is such an intriguing character. As you read the book, it's clear that she's a very lovable person, and yet she is so anxious around others. Tell us more about her and why you chose to highlight a character who suffers from acute anxiety.

A. I also suffer from anxiety, though not as severely as Eloise. But the Worry Wheel, the physical manifestation of her anxiety that I wrote into the book, is very much derived from my own experiences with anxiety. I think it's so important to talk about these kinds of issues, and show that everyone

deserves love. Anxiety doesn't make Eloise "less than" or unlovable. It's just a part of who she is. And she is never free from it, not even at the end. But she learns to manage it better, in a way that allows her to be much more engaged with the world, and as a result living a happier and fuller life.

Q. You have such a gift for creating lovable, intriguing characters. Eloise's best friend Rachel, her neighbors, and Agustín's family – they are as fully realized as your main protagonists. Are these characters inspired by people you know?

A. No, I never write anyone real into my books! They are all my imaginary friends, though they always feel very real to me, like I get the honor of peeking into their lives for one moment in time ☺ I love writing the secondary characters, because they can fill so many different roles in a story, and create so much life and vibrancy to a narrative. However, I will say that Madame Boularès, Eloise's French neighbor, was the name of my French teacher when I studied abroad in Paris for one semester during college. I hope she doesn't mind that I used her name in this book.

Q. Animal lovers will especially love your book since you feature quite a cast of canine characters! Tell us a bit about these elderly dogs and why they hold a special place in your heart.

A. Oh man, I am such an advocate for rescuing seniors and if this book inspires just one person to bring a senior dog (or cat) into their homes and hearts, I will be overjoyed. I knew I wanted a dog for years, and I had been following a rescue online (now defunct sadly) called Susie's Senior Dogs. The number of seniors who are overlooked simply because of their age, the photos of dogs who had been languishing at shelters for years, just broke my heart. And then seeing them placed with families, seeing the joy on their faces, I knew I wanted to make it my life's mission to provide a home for the golden years of as many dogs as possible. And so the moment my landlord changed the rules of my building to allow pets, I immediately started to look into adoption. And that's when I found my first senior rescue,

Pippin, a deeply traumatized chihuahua and the inspiration for Pip in the book.

Q. What do you hope readers will take away from Eloise and Augustin's romance?

A. Every romance novel is different, and this one felt very healing to me—a chance to combine that deep sense of peace and trust that is created when you truly love someone, along with the excitement that comes with discovering a new place and culture. I truly hope readers enjoy it.