**Q&A with *It’s Hard Not to Hate You* author Valerie Frankel**

**What made you decide to write a whole book on toxic emotions?**

I was inspired to write *It’s Hard Not to Hate You* in April 2009 while staring down simultaneous health and career crises. I was diagnosed with colon cancer, which led to the discovery of a genetic mutation that could cause cancers in numerous other organs. At the same time, print journalism took a terrible blow due to the Great Recession. A freelance magazine writer, I was having a bitch of a time getting assignments. My checking account dwindled precariously. The double whammy of problems beyond my control was too much. My carefully maintained easy-going persona cracked under the pressure. Negative emotions seeped out of me at an alarming rate. Instead of trying to suppress them (no longer possible), I resolved to stop fighting and just let them come—in real life, and on the page. The hate in my just had to come out. I’d been wearing a poker face since I was a tweenage closeted rageaholic, so there was a lot of it.

**How has opening the door to negative emotions changed you?**

I had no idea just how happy being angry would make me. Or, more accurately, how great the relief would be. Women struggle to be perfect in so many ways—having a stellar career, being thin, a great cook, a skilled lover, a wise mother. We expect ourselves be emotionally perfect as well. I blame the positivity movement (*The Secret*, etc.), but it goes back farther to “sugar, spice and everything nice.” Anything less that bursting with joy feels like a personal failure and public shame. Happiness, as opposed to Honesty, has become the ultimate emotional goal. I tried to pull off Happy, and hid my darker sentiments for as long as I can remember. It was a defense mechanism. I vowed never to let anyone see me emote. The result: I stunted myself socially, romantically, professionally and, of course, emotionally. This memoir’s goal, of feeling whatever comes up without guilt or shame, was a humanizing process. As in, I let myself be human. I quickly discovered that I was not alone in the Hater Closet. By outing my jealousy, impatience, envy and anger, my eyes opened to just how much swirled around me. More than I dared imagine. This was a joy and comfort.

**What advice would you give someone who doesn’t want to own (hello, Oprah!) her negative emotions?**

Some women are genuinely delighted by the successes of their peers, love their children’s friends like their own, and smile patiently at slow service and bad manners. Such super humans do exist. I just don’t happen to know any. If I ever meet one, I’d refer her to the nearest army base for observation. To the women who fear reviling assholes and jerk-offs: The only thing to fear is the nervous breakdown in your future. Shed the Sally Sunshine skin. It’ll feel GREAT. No one actually likes Sally, you know. She’s *soooooo* boring. Her “friends” trash her behind her back.

 Emotional honesty is fun, too, even euphoric. You can look into the eyes of the undeserving dilettante who landed your promotion and say, “Congrats! You totally deserve it!” while joyously, salubriously wishing her dead. If you can banish the Feelings Police from your mind, you’ll have more psychic energy to function at a higher level. All of your emotions—good, bad and fugly—will be more intense. You’ll feel angri*er*, but also happi*er*. Which is bett*er*.

**How do your husband and daughters feel about this book?**

The husband’s blurb: “*It’s Hard Not to Hate You* is funny, smart, fast-paced, provocative, thoughtful-yet-lively entertainment! Totally worth the paper it’s printed on! A bit mortifying for me, but I can live with that for the sake of my wife’s emotional health, which I have to deal with Every. Single. Day.”

 When Steve married me seven years ago, he understood that our sex life would be fodder for magazine articles read by millions. Those pieces, however, are edited for length, language and content. There are limits. When I started writing memoirs—without limits, I cut closer to the heart—Steve was philosophical. “If my wife writes a book about me in the forest where no one reads it,” he asked, “is it still embarrassing?” Compared to a stadium-filling magazine readership, my book audience is like a dozen clowns in a Honda. This is a great comfort to Steve.

 As for my daughters, they haven’t read it. They’re too busy on facebook, watching LOL catz videos and reading *A Shore Thing* by Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi. Speaking of which…

**You were Snooki’s ghostwriter! How was that?**

Let’s rephrase. It’s not “ghostwriter.” It’s “collaborator.” Working on Snooki’s novel *A Shore Thing* was tremendous. The writing itself was an absolute blast. I adored Nicole and her excellent managers. For research, I spend four days in Seaside Heights, New Jersey, with my family. My daughters and I got full-body spray tans. Yeah, we glowed. I ate a fried Oreo with a fried pickle chaser. And I hit the *New York Times* bestseller list—“in stealth mode,” as my friend Paul described it. I made a lot of new friends, personal and professional.

 Pertinently, I learned *tons* about hate. *A Shore Thing* detractors compared the frothy, sexy, beach comedy to the coming of Armageddon, the death of publishing and the decay of American culture. I’d never seen so much rage about a book! Even more than *Decision Points*. For a couple of weeks, I was a wreck about it. I forget one of the *It’s Hard Not to Hate You* epiphanies, and took the avalanche of criticism personally.

 Nicole, however, was a Zen master. She let the negativity slide off her shoulders like so much bronzer. Her attitude: “Gotta let the haterz hate.” Which was basically the message of this memoir: “Gotta let the hater hate; the hater is me.”

 If I was free to hate, so was anyone else, as passionately as they liked. When this concept penetrated my consciousness, I relaxed and was able to enjoy the novel’s success. Next time my confidence is shaken (and there certainly will be a next time), I’ll heed Nicole’s example of always keeping a sense of humor, not taking things personally and being brave. That’s right: Nicole Polizzi is my role model for emotional authenticity. Just saying…