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"And then there was..." by Jan Collins Selman; www.jancollinselman.com

*The following is my phone interview with this warm, funny, and authentically charming author who has been there with me along with millions of other women, nudging us into action whether it be manifesting good in our lives or just making peace with them. Sarah Ban Breathnach is the author of twelve books, including the two #1 New York Times best-sellers, *Simple Abundance* and *Something More*. Named one of the country's "most fascinating women of power and influence", she has been a twelve-time Oprah guest and in the Official Commemorative Edition of *Behind the Scenes of 25 Incredible Years*, is the number 4 "aha" moment for the talk show host. *Breathnach* is credited with being the creator of the Gratitude Movement in the United States by creating the *Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude*.*

*She seems to have a very real spiritual energy and unlike some of her contemporaries, she actually walks the talk. In her latest book, *Peace and Plenty*, she even reveals that she falls down sometimes on that walk but she shows us how to let go of what's not truly important and get back up again. The book discusses women's unique relationship to money and is full of practical advice but always served up with a bit of the magic in between the lines, giving us moments of contentment and serenity. *Peace and Plenty* is right on time too as we're all facing economic shifts and as with her other books, she speaks to the fact that we are not alone. We invite you to put your cares aside, pause the day and pull up a chair...*

Interview with Sarah Ban Breathnach by Denise Bouchard

DB: You speak of Rumpelstiltskin, our subconscious mind, as the strange collaborator that helps us to spin our creative straw into gold outside the confines of our reasoning and rationale. Instead of a necklace or ring, we surrender pride and control of the dream. Instead of our firstborn, we surrender our ego; we admit we cannot do it alone. We relinquish our hold and slip into a creative slumber so that the subconscious mind can go to

work on our behalf. You reference here the words of another prolific writer, Joseph Murphy, who discusses the alchemy of the story. I've had some amazing experiences which allow room for the Latin 'inspiritus' (the spirit of inspiration) to come through. As I was working on a story about a haunting, a song kept playing on the radio every time I sat down to "spin the words"; the song, I realized, tied in so deeply with the theme that I discovered I had to use it in the story. I've literally had a lightning bolt at the window where I was writing a story on Salem when I wondered whether I should include an actual historical personality from that time- believe me, he's in the story! Don't you just love it when you know you're not writing alone- even if it gives you goose bumps? How do you go about instructing writers to allow for the subconscious to step in at the spinning wheel and 'go for the gold', so to speak?

SBB: *I get out of my own way. I ask Holy Spirit, "The Great Creator", to come in and I ask, "What needs to be said here?" I always think that the work knows much more than I do. I rewrite everything about twenty times but I'm always asking to be guided to the next step. It's a lot harder to strike a chord of artificiality when you're in flow, as opposed to when you're consciously guiding the writing along. I ask to be given the gift to flesh it out. I'm a writer of spirituality, so I ask what I need more of in my life to speak to my readers.*

DB: As editors of a literary magazine, Nicole, my daughter, and I enjoy diving deep into the hidden themes of art and writing, discovering how they can often coincide. In *Romancing the Ordinary*, you write about the "One Story Worth Telling" (page 403). I loved this exercise where you instructed the reader to choose an image that resonated with them to place in a workbook where they would then write about the story it told them. The image I chose was the painting entitled, "The King and the Beggar Maid" by Edmund Blair Leighton. I don't know why this picture spoke to me because my origins and circumstances were from a family of influence; but within that family I served as caregiver and with that came the lessons of my soul essence number, four, divined from numerology as having the 'Cinderella complex' and standing with the line of the four holding up burdens that aren't my own. It spurred two fiction stories and two poems. Further images came to me as I wrote. I discovered later that the house I had written about dating back to the sixteenth century in a historical fiction piece actually existed- it was up for sale on an international real estate site! I would use that house again in a story where the protagonist moves overseas and realizes that she has lived before in the home that she so desperately wants. My own sister commented that it scared her to read that story: "I felt like you were there!" The question that I have involving the choice of images and archetypes is this- as you work with the art, its stories and meaning for you, can you change your true personal legend along the way? If the piece of artwork chosen has a limiting connotation or a positive one, can it shape not only how you view yourself but also your circumstances in a way of outward manifestation?

SBB: *The artwork can shape your self-perception and your circumstances. When we are born, we are given 'soul lessons' and we accept the contract. As soon as we learn the lesson it disappears but first we need to get the lesson. As we learn, as we grow, the picture reveals more. This is taken from William Butler Yeats- "As we change- [it] changes."*

DB: You know, after I wrote the fiction stories I looked up the actual legend and learned that the king hadn't relinquished his crown at all but had given it to the maiden to become his queen. My story titled, "The Man Who Would Not Be King", made for an interesting and different take on the Cinderella archetype as the protagonist forsakes his right to the throne to be with the woman he loves- but in fact, in the actual painting, he was offering her everything and she said yes to it, stepping into her power. In my own personal life, my husband has given me everything that I wanted of life and love but I personally have never truly owned my talents or stepped into publishing using my voice until now. It's interesting that once I found out what the actual story behind the painting was, I had a great 'aha!' moment.

SBB: *That's fascinating... how you were able to do the spiritual work associated with the painting through your fiction writing and learned personally that nothing has to be necessarily relinquished to achieve one's destiny.*

On the Comfort Found in Good Old Books~

“Visiting a special second-hand bookstore can trigger a religious experience for me. Here I glimpse eternity as time stands still; hours become minutes and I am suspended in the Hereafter. The dog-eared, gilded-page, embossed and foxed with age receive me with the knowing of an old flame, but instead of arms, I am enveloped by the fragrance of leather mingled with a slight, sweet, musty scent.”

DB: Considering that you feel as strongly as I do that entering second hand/independent bookstores and old libraries is like walking into sacred sanctuaries, what are your feelings on speculations concerning e-books replacing hand-held books, moves to close over 500 UK libraries and the prophecy by Australian government minister, Nick Sherry, that in five or so years bookstores will be a thing of the past, leaving only specialty shops in large cities?

SBB: *I don't think e-books will ever replace books entirely. I always like to curl up in bed at night and read before I go to sleep. I like the feel of the book itself. If I don't know what I'm looking for, I like the mystery of finding that special book in a library or a second hand bookstore. That said, we traditionalists will have to learn to co-exist with the inevitable. Also, since it is becoming a large part of the publishing business, we can use its more favorable aspects. One aspect of e-books that I love is that you can find a copy of everything you're looking for and that really is a spiritual gift.*

DB: You tell us in *Simple Abundance* of a special meditation you use called “The Golden Mirror Meditation”; you visualize in your mind an enormous mirror the size of a room with an elaborately carved, 24kt gold frame- this is your materializing mirror. You share with us how after doing this meditation for a year you were invited on an all expenses paid trip to Dublin, one of your favorite cities, to stay at the Shelbourne. When you walked in, there was a beautiful gold leaf-framed mirror that was so large it took up an entire wall of the lounge. You laughed with delight when you saw your reflection in it, for here was the universe’s way of demonstrating to you that whatever we visualize in our minds can come to pass in the physical world.

I had an interesting experience with this exercise as well. It was about fifteen years ago. I'd had an operation on my ear which had had a troublesome artery. They shaved some of my hair off during surgery and being a girly girl that seemed very traumatic to me. It was near Thanksgiving and nothing seemed to look right with the new hair-do. I kept visualizing a healthy looking me in the golden mirror. My young daughter at the time sat in a chair in my bedroom and didn't leave until we found the right chic little outfit to go with the short hair. We walked into the hotel restaurant and there was a beautiful scene of an abundant harvest with hay bales, a scarecrow and pumpkins. Behind this, along one wall was a large, golden mirror; I caught myself smiling at the fall harvest display and I looked radiant. Later in the dining room, a woman remarked about my daughter, “Isn't that young girl beautiful?” “Yes,” said her companion, “... and her mother is too.” I felt as though the universe was validating the image that I'd tried to create.

SBB: *You created an image of health! We are amnesiacs; we forget that we have the physical power of that spiritual connection.*

DB: It's like plugging ourselves in.

SBB: *Yes, it's spiritual electricity.*

DB: In your latest book, *Peace and Plenty*, within the section entitled “Down for the Count”, you quote poet Diane Ackerman:

“Because poets feel what we're afraid to feel, venture where we're reluctant to go, we learn from their journeys without taking the same dramatic risks. Think of all the lessons to be learned from deep rapture, danger, tumult, romance, intuition. But it's far too exhausting to live like that on a daily basis, so we ask artists to explore for us.”

You have given us a full 360 degree education of what it is to rise, to fall, to get back up again and how your abiding philosophies sustained you along the way. You have gone through the rapture, tumult and wonder using your intuition to guide not only yourself but your readers through the thick of the woods. For this we are grateful. Of all the hard won wisdom that you've obtained, about the external material world and the internal world of the heart, what lesson was it that transformed your outlook on life the most?

SBB: *Protect yourself first! And this was so contrary to who I thought I was. I was so used to thinking of everyone else.*

DB: I love that. It's something that I want my daughter to come to understand.

SBB: *Yes, I think as women, we tend to do this on an automatic level- to put everyone else first. So for me to come to the realization that I had to put me first at this stage caused such tumult, such a range of conflicting emotions.*

DB: You've written, "All my life, I've never felt as if I've belonged anywhere, my harried heart was possessed by a mysterious, holy longing that never seemed to be satisfied."

"Inside Newton's Chapel the stillness was so luxurious, sacred, people would comment on its peacefulness, how healing the energy felt and some even burst into tears when crossing the threshold, as if some mysticism had touched a hidden sorrow, and here they found a refuge from their pain."

Wow- holy ground, all this and an Aga stove.

Of all that you've been through, I want to say that I'm sorry for the loss of Newton's Chapel. If only we could always manifest the right choices and hold steady in order to avoid the pain.

SBB: *But then we wouldn't know heaven's glorious mystery. We need the lessons in order to grow spiritually.*

DB: I feel that way about my own home and my life; that there's something else out there that's a better fit for us location-wise than my family and I have yet to discover. My manifestation is a colonial with a park-like yard; roses, hydrangeas, and every wildflower variety there is are scattered throughout and all blooming at different times. Inside, it's so beautiful but sometimes you're surrounded by situations that are all wrong for you. I know you cannot control your environment. Would you like to say something about the Newton house?

SBB: *It was a wrenching, wrenching loss. It's up for sale now but I was blessed to have lived there and I hope the new owners will be blessed as well. And I think the spiritual lesson was this- in order to live the life worth living for me and get to the next step, I have to be willing to give up the life I had.*

DB: I feel that you're going to have a big, big life, Sarah. I think you're going to love the next step which you well deserve as you've always been such a balm to my soul as I'm sure you were for millions of other women.

SBB: *Oh! Thank you! You've also been a balm to my soul today, Denise.*

As to the story of how I first discovered Sarah Ban Breathnach, one of her quotes about finding the right book at the right time touches upon the serendipity involved when I went on a family vacation and literally just missed her giving a lecture at my hotel:

"Occasionally, stumbling down a dusky corridor, I will be embraced by the light, as a sunbeam sliver or an angels wing leads me to exactly the book I need but wasn't consciously aware of. Frankly, this has happened so many times it's no longer paranormal but standard operating procedure."

In 1995 my family and I visited Disney World and stayed at the beautiful Disney Institute resort. The Welcome Center was surrounded by picturesque studios and lecture halls where you could take courses on

botanical gardening, healthy cooking, journaling, illustration, and movie make-up as well hear current authors speak or go to a concert of classical music. It was the brain-child of Michael Eisner and harked back to the days when upstate New York had such inns where you could stay in a beautiful and relaxing setting and learn something new.

Here I would go through the Institute's current offerings and see that a new author named Sarah Ban Breathnach was giving a talk on her new book called *Simple Abundance* and the titled jumped out at me. Unfortunately I also saw that I had just missed her but found that the book was available in the nearby Disney Village Marketplace bookstore. On the way out of the bookstore I would grab an attractive writing journal not because I needed one but because the villa we were staying in had a writing desk and I had already claimed it without a purpose in mind.

Inside of *Simple Abundance* near the beginning of the book, we readers are asked to buy a journal where we are instructed to be giving thanks on a nearly daily basis. And here was my first serendipitous experience with the *Simple Abundance* way of life. There upon the desk in our villa was *Simple Abundance* and a new journal waiting for all the things I would be grateful for in the next year. Perfect. It was here that I started writing again... See "Snapshots" in the Our Stories section of the autumn 2009 issue: (http://www.thewriteplaceatthewritetime.org/images/Fall_09_Our_Stories_Non-fiction.pdf).

On that trip my family and I would walk at dusk alone on a moonlit night through Adventure Land as one of the rides was being fixed, meet Drew Carey in a cooking class where he was my husband's cooking partner, meet Susan Egan who would tell my daughter to follow her dreams, dance under the pines with my husband and daughter outside of our villa, have dinner inside Cinderella's castle and buy a book called *Simple Abundance* which would serve to enrich my life for years and years to come.

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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