

Words For Writers Podcast Transcript: Episode 2, Sarah Sundin

Ginny: For as long as I can remember, since childhood even, when I've fallen in love with the book, I've wanted to sit down and talk with the author. Now I'm doing just that. Welcome to Words with Writers. I'm your host, Ginny Yttrup. I'm an award-winning, best-selling author. And I'm talking to authors about the writing craft, the writing life, and the books you love. Thanks for joining us.

I am excited to welcome Sarah Sundin to the podcast today. Sarah is a historical romance fiction writer, and she is also a friend. We have become friends and work colleagues over the last couple of years. We'll talk a little bit about that, but first I just want to introduce Sarah and share some of the highlights of her career so far.

Sarah Sundin is the best-selling author of several popular World War II series, including *Sunrise at Normandy*, *Waves of Freedom*, *Wings of the Nightingale*, and *Wings of Glory*. Her novels have received starred reviews from Booklists, Library Journal, and Publishers Weekly. *The Sky Above Us* received the Carroll Award. Her best-selling *The Seed Before Us* received the FHL Reader's Choice Award and both *Through Waters Deep* and *When Tides Turn* were named on Booklists' 101 "Best Romance Novels of the Last 10 Years."

I think I counted fourteen novels and one novella. Is that correct?

Sarah: Almost. Thirteen.

Ginny: Thirteen. Okay. Your newest novel *When Twilight Breaks* is your first full-length stand-alone, is that correct?

Sarah: That's correct. All my other books have been in a three-book series, so it's quite a thing to write a standalone novel.

Ginny: I almost wondered as I was reading ... it's just such an incredible story ... I'll get to that question. My mind was absolutely boggled from a writer's perspective. The way you were able to weave in the historical details and accurate historical events into the plot of this story—seamlessly—was just incredible to me.

I want to talk a little bit more about that and share a couple of the early reviews you have received for *When Twilight Breaks*. Booklist starred review: "Sundin's novels set the gold standard for historical war romance, and *When Twilight Breaks* is arguably her most brilliant and important work to date."

Library Journal starred review, accolades from publishers weekly—that must feel amazing.

Sarah: Yeah. Overwhelming and amazing. I'm hoping it lives up to that reputation when people actually read it.

Ginny: From an early reader's perspective, I'd say they hit the nail on the head. It hooked me from the very beginning. Share a little bit about the plot and the inspiration behind the story.

Sarah: Oh, the plot was fun. I'll actually start with the inspiration because we went to Ellis Island a few years ago and put family names into the computer to see if we could find anything about people who'd come over from Europe, but it turned out they came to America before Ellis Island opened. But I found my grandfather's name from when he returned to America from Germany from his junior year abroad in 1936.

I knew he'd studied in Germany as a college student, but I looked at that and realized he was there in Hitler's Germany—in Nazi, Germany. Unfortunately, he passed away even before I was born, so I never met him, but my mind was like, wow, what would it be like to be an American student in Nazi, Germany, to be there, but also observing.

The story started blossoming. Now I have graduate students and he's a little older, more mature than my grandfather was at the time. And I have an American foreign correspondent. They're both there observing, affected by all the events around them, watching how it affects the people they know—the Germans they know—on both sides. Being able to see it almost from an outsider's perspective, but also still be right in the middle of it. Of course, my novelist brain goes into high gear.

Nazi Germany wasn't exactly a safe place to be. How could they get themselves in trouble? And it wasn't too hard to get them in trouble (laughs). That makes a novel—you want your characters to get in trouble. So I put them in trouble.

My grandfather did not get in trouble with the Gestapo or anything like that. He came home safely, no problems, but it was fun to let my little writer's brain do the “what ifs.”

Ginny: Absolutely. What's so fascinating to me about the way it's written and about what you've done with the story is some of those things could have happened and your research seems to inform the plot. Yet, the plot is so solid on its own. Oftentimes in historical fiction, it seems as though the history comes through in the setting mostly, and obviously some of the circumstances. The timeline of this novel in Nazi Germany really informed the plot or a lot of the plot, it seemed like, and you wove that together seamlessly.

Sarah: Yes. That's a lot of editing because I love research. There's so much fascinating stuff I learned while researching this that I want to get all in there because I want my readers to experience it too. And I just have to chop, chop, chop, chop, chop, because it doesn't fit the story. Yes, it's interesting, but no it's not necessary.

So I'm cutting, cutting, cutting, and I have to say this to myself over and over and over again: Does the reader need to know this information to understand this story? And it's always the reader, the need to understand the story. I mean, those, all those four pieces have to go together. It's not what do I feel like want to convey, and not even, what should the reader know about this time era? That's, that's not relevant. It's only what is relevant so they can understand what's going on in the story.

I have to keep removing things that don't fit, and sometimes I have to add other things in. My editors will read through and think, "Why are they doing this? It doesn't make any sense, like all of us because of this law of such and such."

Oh yeah. I didn't explain that (laughs). Sometimes I have to add it back in because you become very familiar. This is my 13th World War II era novel, so the danger is that I understand the World War II era very deeply. A lot of it makes sense to me.

I remember the first time I went to my writers' group, and it was my very first World War II novel. I mentioned the hero says something about fighting the Axis Powers. One of the ladies in my group says, "What are the 'axis'?"

I thought everybody learned that in high school history—and this is a very smart woman—but she said, "Oh, we forget these things. Sometimes I have to define what for me is a really natural thing to know, and to find those terms, reminding myself, it's not that the readers aren't smart. They're very smart, but we forget. Sometimes if you love Civil War and don't know World War II, you're not gonna understand that thing.

I have to be careful to explain enough, but not to overexplain, because I have other readers who are major World War II buffs. I have to always balance between those.

Ginny: You've talked about two things that for writers are very important for us to remember. One we call the curse of knowledge. We know the story, we know the plot, we know what's happened. Sometimes we forget to include the reader in that or we become self-indulgent and give more than they need. But you also talked about the importance of your writing for the reader and we need to remember that always because we do get involved in our own stories and research and enjoy that aspect of it.

Sarah: That's why I love having critique partners. I typically have critique partners who aren't interested in World War II and they read my books, but that isn't something they read about. They don't watch the documentaries. So, if they can understand what's going on, my reader can understand what's going on. These are multi-published authors that are very well-educated people, but that's not their thing. If I can explain it well to them, that's good.

I also have one of my critique partners who only reads a whole act at a time. I give her one and I'll give her act two and then I'll give her act three. She can see the bigger picture, like, "Oh, I don't understand why the resistance does this and that," or "why the Nazis do that." She gets a more of a big picture aspect of it so I can see where I'm not explaining well. Those are two things I make sure I do with my critique partners.

Ginny: That's great. It's so valuable to find good critique partners, isn't it?

Sarah: It is. I love them.

Ginny: Tell us a little bit, especially for those aspiring historical fiction writers, about your research process. This was one of the many mind-boggling pieces of this book—the snippets of

the German language that you used and the detail that was so rich and makes this story so authentic and layered. What's your process for research?

Sarah: Two things. First of all, I start general and work down to the specific. I brought my books out with me. I read this big honkin' book, *The Third Reich in Power*.

Ginny: Wow. For those who are just listening, it's about the size of four books (laughs).

Sarah: It's almost a thousand pages. It's huge.

Ginny: Wow.

Sarah: This is a good book about Nazi Germany during the 1930s. This is actually part of a three-book series where he has one where it's Hitler's rise to power and then he has another one just during the war. This is the one that's just the thirties, which is the setting of my story. He describes the German society in great detail and all the different areas from the military to social, how they treated the Jews, to culture. All these different parts really helped me.

Now this is a general book. It is about Nazi Germany, but I let the story guide me into more specifics. For example, my heroine is a foreign correspondent. So I read William Shirer's *Berlin Diary*. He was an American correspondent in Germany in the late 1930s and he kept a diary. It was a best seller in the early 1940s and he's a very engaging writer too.

He talks about all the little things and a lot of the stories. The things that Evelyn gets herself in trouble are things that happen to real foreign correspondents, where their informants would get captured and executed. Where they were, some of them are sheltering Jews. Some of them are meeting in clandestine areas and passing notes.

A lot of the things Evelyn does are things that American correspondents did and how they had to transmit their stories because the Germans only wanted very positive information coming out and how they could get kicked out of the country. This isn't the only one I read, but it's an example—it's the best example.

Because my characters are Americans—they're not Germans—I read a bunch of books about Americans living in Germany at the time, or visiting Germany. This one's called *Hitler Land: American Eyewitnesses to the Nazi Rise of Power*. There are books like this that showed the dichotomy of how some Americans went to Nazi Germany and saw low unemployment. This is during the Great Depression. America had 25 to 33% unemployment at the time. Germany had zero.

They were building buildings and bridges, and people were working. People were happy. They were well fed. There was order in the street. Now it was order at a price, but there was order in the street. A lot of Americans came up and we've got riots back home. We've got soup lines. No one has jobs and they come to Germany, and it's all shiny and prosperous. A lot of Americans saw, "He's doing something, right. What can we do?" That's like that.

Other Americans came and saw the oppression; they saw what it was like to live under a police state. That order, as I said, came at a price. You were looking over your shoulder. Is the grocer overhearing me grumble about Hitler and am I going to get sent to the concentration camp? There's that terror aspect. Some Americans are very focused on that.

Very interesting. They said most Americans came in with preset notions, that it was going to be one way or the other, and that their experiences there reinforced their views and made them stronger. Oh, so much like America today. It was very spooky. There were some examples.

My grandfather was a professor of German and this is his text, the one he wrote.

Ginny: How neat. Wow.

Sarah: Some of the things that Peter and the story does to explain—how to use your tongue, your lips—those are in this book because that was something my grandfather and his colleague worked on in their research. I took German in college, but it's been awhile and I refreshed it. We spent the summer in Germany in 2007 (long story). Great, amazing experience. I refreshed it then, but that's been 13, 14 years, so I used my grandpa's book to refresh my German. That's an example.

My two big hints with historical research are start general and go specific, and follow the story. I'm often getting people sending me books. “Hey, you should read this; it's a great book about World War II. Yes, but it's not for my story. It's about the Marines on Iwo Jima. That would be a great story, but that's not what my novel is about.

I have to be very careful with my research time because I have to read so much that I need to be very careful. Rabbit trails have their purpose—often a rabbit trail will inspire my next novel. I don't ignore them completely, but I do have to be very careful and watch my time because I'm on deadline.

The next thing is to read widely. People send me their World War II books for endorsement and I'm finding the level of research has really gone up for historical novelists, which I love. Every once in a while, I'll read the book and I can tell which three books she read for her research. Because I recognize the facts from that book and that book, and that book. But there's so many errors in there, not necessarily errors of fact, but it's errors of perspective because the more widely read, the more you understand that each non-fiction writer is going to want to come at things from different angles. You need to get as many perspectives as you can to get a bigger picture. You need what I call the bird's-eye view.

The generals leading armies and the kings and presidents doing their thing—what the nations do, that gives you the broad historical perspective of what was happening at that time. You need those, but you also need what I call the worm's eye view, where the diaries, the personal experience stories, their oral histories, all those things that tell you: What did it feel like? What kind of foods you eat, what was the weather like. All those things add color to your story, and it makes it feel personal. So you need all of that.

All those little things, like finding out that the Nazis banned wearing lipstick; it's a weird little thing, but it makes a great historical detail. Here's my character who loves wearing red, and she's got wear a red dress and rubies in her hair and she can't wear red lipstick, just all those fun little [details]. It's also a type of thing where we read it and ask, "They ban lipstick? How stupid is that?" It shows a lot about how the Nazis view women and how they view culture. I look for those little details that add color.

Ginny: It just amazing to me. One of the things that I noticed, well, two things: First of all, I want to read a very brief paragraph from the book. It fascinated me.

We're recording this in early 2021. We are still in the midst of a pandemic. We've just come through all of the racial unrest in 2020—protests, riots. I mean, it was a year (laughs).

Sarah: Like none we have experienced in our lifetime.

Ginny: What I found fascinating about reading *When Twilight Breaks* is how much of it felt like some of what we have just gone through. Your character, Peter Lang, says he's processing something. (This is early in the story.) He's processing something he has just witnessed on the street between the Gestapo, I believe, and an elderly man. He's talking about from an American perspective, he's American.

He is thinking, "Yes, free speech had its problems. Free speech could work people into a frenzy, leading to violence. Lives and property needed to be protected." And that's sort of what we saw this last year, and it was interesting to me how we see history repeat itself. That reminder of yes, there's a cost for freedom and yes, it isn't perfect, but so valuable. Very interesting.

You talked about the depression and everything that was going on economically, and we have experienced a lot of economic hardship in this last year. Just very interesting to read this at this juncture and see some of those parallels.

Also, I'd love for you to talk about this a little bit, because we're reading this in retrospect, and we know what happened in Nazi Germany. We know what happened with Hitler. That increases the tension in the story, which makes it that much more readable because we know that part of where it's going, but you were able to then weave in the tension from just the plot of the story, the romantic tension and all of that together. I hadn't thought about how history itself can play into that tension for a writer, and you seem to really use that.

Sarah: Oh, it's, it's lovely for me. Plotting is the most difficult part for me. I love characters. I love dialogue. I love the research. For me writing the plot is hard work. I call it like a smackdown wrestling match, and part of it is because I'm trying to fit it with the history, because I don't like I don't break historical timelines. "I'm going to move this event because it fits my story better—" I can't do that.

The beauty of historical fiction is that history comes with its own tension. You can add this stuff in where this real event happened. I don't have to make it up. There was the Kristallnacht— this great, horrible wave of violence against the Jews, and being able to use that as a plot device, while also illuminating the times. History comes with its own built-in stuff.

You could write a novel set in 2020, and wow, you got all sorts of interesting material to work with. Pandemics and riots and problems and chaos (laughs).

Ginny: That's true.

Sarah: Fifty years from now there are going to be some amazing novels set in 2020.

Ginny: We're not ready for them yet, but you're absolutely right. You did a masterful job with this and I think readers will just be enthralled. I learned so much. I was very excited to have the opportunity to read it and read it early.

You and I met at the Mount Herman Writers Conference many years ago. You have been on faculty for writers conferences. We are both serving West Coast Christian Writers, a nonprofit that helps equip writers. We have learned a little bit about each other's writing process, as we've gotten to know each other. We approach writing a novel from polar opposites. Our process could not be more different. You are a very intricate plotter.

Sarah: I'm the far end of the spectrum plotter.

Ginny: And I am the other end of the spectrum—seat of the pants writer. Your process has always fascinated me, and I can see the necessity of it, absolutely, in what you're doing. Talk a little bit for the writers who are listening about how you plot a book and the difference between plotting a standalone novel and the series that you have written.

Sarah: First of all, I want to clarify something. What you do is like magical, mysterious and like, “woo.” I have no idea how seat of the pants writers—it baffles me. What I do is not necessary for writing historical fiction. For me, I can't imagine writing historical fiction without an outline, but Melanie Dobson, who's one of my dear writing friends, not only writes incredible historical fiction, very well researched, but she writes dual timeline. The tapestry of these two plots that are converging and are all intricately connecting. I call her books tapestries.

They're so beautifully woven together and she writes seat of the pants. I look at her books and go, “How is it?” I would have charts showing how this plot line has to be intersecting here and how I introduced this plot there and that outline point there. I would have this incredible outline and she does it by the seat of the pants. If you like historical fiction and you do not like outlines it's okay.

Ginny: Good. That's good for people to know.

Sarah: I'm a huge proponent of “you have to write in the manner that suits your personality best.” I'm also one of these people, if I go on a trip, I have my maps and I have my itinerary and I know

where I'm sleeping each night. If I were to leave the house and not know where I'm sleeping that night, I would be so anxious that I wouldn't be able to enjoy the journey. I'd only be thinking of where I'm going to sleep that night. For me, writing a novel without an outline would be like that. I'd be so anxious about where I'm going to end up that I wouldn't be able to enjoy the journey. An outline is a sense of security. I know where I'm sleeping tonight. I know there's going to be plenty food and there'll be a warm bed. I can relax, enjoy the journey and really love it.

Other people, the pantsers, when they hear about outlines, they say, "That's going to destroy all my creativity. I feel like I've already written this novel in the outline. So why write it?" So you have to do what feeds your creativity. For you, Ginny, and for you pantsers, not having an outline, feeds your creativity. An outline feeds my creativity. Feed your creativity at all costs.

Ginny: (laughs)

Sarah: My peer is laughing because it's intricate, but I also was a chemistry major. I'm a pharmacist. When you look at left brain/right brain, I'm right in the middle. I'm much more analytical and detail oriented. Most writers are very right brain. For me, chop charts and plots—I'm very visual too. I need to see it in front of me so I can make sense of it. I have all sorts of stuff.

With my 13th novel, I've got it down to a science. I start off, I've got character questionnaires that I fill out and get to know. This is Evelyn's. It's long, but I love it. People look at this and go, "You could do this on the computer, you know." I was like, yeah, I know. But when I'm in the brainstorming part of the story, I think best by writing by hand.

I sit on the couch in a comfy position and I write this out. As I'm getting to know Evelyn, I'm thinking I could play with her name, Brand. "Firebrand! Oh yeah. That's fun." There are things that come out and I'll get scene ideas and I'll scribble those down on pieces of paper and set them aside. It's a lot of fun.

Then I'll write family history on the back. How did her family come to America? Because that's part of her history. It's a very dreamy part of the story for me. I get to know my characters. I have all these little bits and pieces of notes. I've got scene ideas on index cards. At this point, I'm starting to freak out. How am I going to pull this all together into a story? Then I go to my computer and I make a really rough draft. It's like, "Okay, this is going to happen, and *this* is going to happen."

I put my historical information because I've got to work around it. It's really sparse, but I have a story here. I know what's going to kind of happen in the first act and where my major plot points are going to be. I really love story structure and getting to know story structure. The more I understood the hero's journey, it really improved my writing.

Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* is one of my favorite writing books. I recommend it all the time. Even if you are a pantser, I like to tell my pantser writing friends, look at story structure, look at the hero's journey in the editing process. Write your book, get it out of your

system, and now look through it and analyze the story structure and your need to edit according to that.

I do most of that before I write the book. I'm looking at where my major plot points are going to be, where are the points of decision. Do I have enough tension in these certain areas? I play with my scenes and then I get to the point where I think, "This is the first draft. This is the second draft." I'm starting to actually get chapter ideas. I'm looking at this and laughing, because I see two whole chapters that I deleted at the beginning. I realized, that was stupid, I really didn't need that chapter. I thought it was going to be good. I started writing the chapter and thought, "Let's delete that chapter." Got rid of it.

Even though I outline, I still play. Then I really develop it. This is my plot chart and I break it down by scenes and by character—the romance plot line, the action plot line, the emotional and spiritual journey plot line. I break it all down and I go through chapter by chapter and then I can write. When I'm writing my rough draft, I'll look at this and know what's going to happen in the chapter. I write a real brief, bullet-point outline of what's been happening (as I said, obsessive outliner), and then I can write it.

I have a really excessive process, but people say of the outline, "What if it changes?" Yeah, it changes. This is a copy of my plot chart from the third act, the last act, and I've written this outline before I started writing the whole novel. As I'm getting to know the characters, I'm thinking, "Oh wait, that's not gonna work because this and this and that." Then I do more research and go, "Oh man, that can't happen then."

The last act is usually a lot of rewriting. You see all these notes and circles. The book I'm writing right now, I actually had to throw out the whole last act, the plot chart, and write a whole new one because, um, there was so much that had changed. It was just too messy. I'm just going to redo it.

It's still a process. There's still a lot of discovery and surprises that happen. I'm learning to go with that. I think when writing the first couple novels, I was like, "I want this to happen." I'm a lot more fluid now. I'll let the story train me to a certain extent.

Ginny: That is amazing. I read somewhere, and it may have been on an email loop that we're both on, that you don't necessarily work to a daily word count. You write scenes in chapters. You plan out your writing time by I'm going to ...what?

Sarah: It depends. That's the other reason I don't like the word count goals is because when I'm on the outlining phase, I'm not writing any words. It looks like I'm not, but I am, I'm writing my story. I break it down. By this time, I know how long it takes me to do each portion of the process. I work back from my deadline and I'll need this many months for this and this many months for that. I go by week to week and say, "This week I'm going to write Evelyn's plot chart or character chart. And next week I'll write Peter's plot and character chart. And then I'll do my first next outline." I'm still keeping myself on task, but it's not necessarily meaning word count.

Also, and this is just personal, when I'm writing, and I say I have to write 2000 words a day, it feels like a chore. I'm like, "1,797 words, I've got to write 200 more." It feels like writing an essay in high school, like, "This is a very, very, very, very good book. I really, really, really loved it." I find myself trying to fluff up my words to make word count, but I'm an over writer.

I have to cut about five to 10,000 words in my editing process. I don't want to do anything that encourages over writing. I need to encourage writing tight. Right now I'm finishing my novel. I have literally one more chapter in the novel I'm writing right now. Of course, when I'm speeding toward the end, in the last act, I find I write a chapter a day.

Once again, it's already outlined. I know what's going to happen, so it's not like I have to think, "What's going to happen?" I usually say it takes me about two days to write a chapter when I'm in rough draft mode—half a chapter a day. If I write half a chapter that day, I've met my goal. If my chapter is only 1500 words, yay, that means I'm going to be closer to my word count (laughs). Sometimes I reward myself for writing fewer words, but I meet my deadlines.

She says hopefully. It's been a little bit tight this year with COVID. My husband retired, so he's been home. There've been things that have made it a little behind this year, so it's a little tighter, but as I said, it's due February 1st and I'm finishing it today. It's January 5th. Finish it today or tomorrow. It just means I'll have less time to edit, but it should be fine. Once again, a lot of my pantsing friends say, "Oh, that's crazy. You spend like four months planning beforehand and I can go straight to the book." Yes, but on the other hand, when it comes to the editing, I have less work to do.

I'm adding in a lot of research while reading a new book and realize, "Oh, well that scene doesn't work." I need to fix that scene. It's more minor structural things and obviously cutting words and tightening it up and looking for repetition and all the little things we do. But my editing process is really pretty fast because my structure is fine. My character development is on target. It's the little stuff, so for me, editing is really fast.

A pantsier will spend little to no time on the pre-writing, but we'll spend a lot more time on the pre-writing. It just depends on where you want to spend your time, and I've chosen to spend it pre-writing rather than rewriting. For other people, the pre-writing seems like a waste of time, but they're willing to do a major rewrite. It depends on what works for you.

Ginny: Absolutely, absolutely. And it's interesting to hear what you're calling the free writing and that planning that you do. As a pantsier, I do a lot of that. It just happens within the framework of the manuscript. I'm deleting, but I'm getting to know my characters in that process, and I'm figuring out their history and what's pertinent to the story I'm telling. We share so much in common, plotters and pantsiers, it's just the way we go about it is very different. I love your point that we are wired differently, and we need to figure out what works as writers for us.

Sarah: I've talked to a lot of writers who tried outlining and hated it, and then started writing by the seat of the pants and loved it. I've talked to others who felt like only good writers wrote organically, where it just flowed out of them. They tried doing that and they ended up with a mess and they wrote themselves into a hole. Then they tried an outline. "Oh, wow, this works! I

was told we weren't supposed to write that way.” They feel guilty because they're not being organic (laughs).

Ginny: There's something to be said for using the mind the way God created it and letting it work for you.

Sarah: That's what's so fascinating. Once again, I come from a scientific background. In general, if you do certain things... like in pharmacy. If you give a certain medication, it will have certain effects. It will have certain side effects, but actually they're very logical effects based on the pharmacology of the medication. If you give a certain medication, certain things happen and you expect them to happen. Very logical and even a pharmacy career is very logical. If you do all the right things and you don't get your nose dirty and your career is going to go up, up, up and up. There's a logic to it.

Then I get to writing and some of the best novels I've ever read were written by the seat of the pants. Some of the best novels ever read were written with intricate outlines. You may have the best book ever written, but never be able to get another publishing contract. What is this? It's not logical (laughs).

Ginny: Exactly. Where's the logic?

Sarah: That's very good because I tend to like to control, and I like to have everything in line. I like my routines. Something like this, that throws me for a loop all the time, is actually good and reminds me that I'm not in control and God is in control. It is good.

Ginny: I'm excited for this book to see how readers react to it and to see where it goes. As I said, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it. It's from Revell and it releases February 2nd Tell me where can readers and writers find you online?

Sarah: My website is sarahsundin.com. I'm on Facebook, I'm on Twitter, I'm on Instagram, I'm on Pinterest, under my name. I'm pretty easy to find. There aren't too many Sarah Sundins, and then there's all the writer stuff so I'm pretty easy to find.

Ginny: I will include all of that information in the episode notes. Listeners can find it there, and writers can find you in February at the West Coast Christian Writers Conference online.

Sarah: Yes.

Ginny: Tell us a little bit about the conference and your role in the conference. Writing is not all you do (laughs).

Sarah: All those spreadsheets I grew to love with my writing, I've now applied them to a new thing. My friends now call me the spreadsheet queen, which is really funny, because my mother always talked about how disorganized I was. I was a very organized child; I could never keep my room clean. And now I have mental spreadsheets. Anyway, this year I'm serving as co-director of the conference. My main thing focuses on the programming. I was a program director last

year. I'm selecting for faculties—selecting workshops and circle leaders. I'm really looking at what our writers need from us. It was fun to work with the board and talking about our writing here, because at West Coast, we really foster a community for writers. Not just hold a conference, then see you, bye. But let's build a community with our writers.

What do we need? What do we need for our writers? What do writers want? Trying to focus on the writing craft, both fiction writers and non-fiction writers, also looking at publicity, and then looking at the writing life, trying to have a balance between those topics.

I'm so excited about our faculty. We were really careful to handpick faculty, not just because they're big names, but because they're known as good teachers and because they have a heart for mentoring writers. These are people we we've hand selected. They're not going to be just in the workshops, then see you, bye. They really care about writers.

We love our faculty and the workshop topics. I'm just starting the workshops. They're due next week and they're starting to come in now. I'm looking at these workshops going, “They're so good that people are gonna be so excited about them.” We are doing an online conference this year. The beauty of it, if you go to an in-person conference, you can only go to X many workshops and maybe you buy the recordings. This year we've got six weeks where you can spread out and watch those workshops. I think it's going to be a really great experience.

Ginny: That is 55 plus workshops, is it not?

Sarah: Yes, I think it's 57. You know because you put them all on the website (laughs).

Ginny: It is going to be an amazing conference and what you and Susie have done in terms of planning and the board, it's just been incredible. I will also include information about the conference, which is February, I think 24th through 27th.

Sarah: 25th through 27.

Ginny: 25th through 27th. We'll include information about that in the episode notes too, for writers who are interested. Sarah, thank you so much. You are an incredible teacher. I learned a lot just in this discussion and conversation with you. I know the writers who have been mentored by you and sat under your teaching have learned so much too. And your writing is amazing. Best wishes on this book and thank you so much for your heart for writers and for your time today.

Sarah: Thank you for having me.

Ginny: Thank you for listening to words with writers. For show notes, links, and resources for writers, go to wordsforwriters.net.