

A Q&A with Sarah Pinborough

***Cross Her Heart* is full of sensitive subject matter, was there any point at which you felt uncomfortable writing it?**

There were a lot of places in the book which were difficult to write because of the emotional impact, but the passages where I felt actually uncomfortable writing are mainly in the 'Past' sections. However, they're also sections that I'm really proud of precisely because they were so hard to write. You have to be really careful when touching on subjects of abuse or violence because as an author I would hate to do a disservice to people who have been through experiences like that, and also I would hate to in any way sensationalise. So I hope that the sections that I found the hardest to write perhaps have the most emotional punch.

Female relationships/friendships are a recurring theme in your work, why is that?

Exploring the female dynamic is relatively new in my work - but over the past few years, while in my forties, I've realised what a rich seam of varied experience women have to dig around in - trying to be mothers, daughters, wives, friends, grandmothers, sexual and maternal and all things sugar and spice as expected, carrying the whole family and trying to give everyone what they need. It strikes me that women don't often have time to think about what they want for themselves. Women are often only seen in a 'role' in relation to other people - which I really noticed as I've been (although not any more) single for so much of my adult life. Whereas I was just 'Sarah', often my friends were described in terms of 'x's

mother' or 'y's wife' which I thought must be really irritating as they all have jobs and lives of their own. Also, I was at an all-girls boarding school and the friendships we had there were very intense and then faded as we got older. Now I'm over 35 I've made some really great female friends again and I wanted to write about the stages of friendships women have - completely trusting in childhood, competitive, mistrusting friendships of adolescence and then the calmer, solid, best friendship of being a proper adult.

Which was the most emotional scene in *Cross Her Heart* for you to write?

There are a lot of emotional scenes in *Cross Her Heart* but in fact the epilogue was probably the most emotional for me personally because I'd written the whole journey and it is - without giving anything away - quite a bittersweet ending.

In both *Behind Her Eyes* and *Cross Her Heart*, was there one character you liked writing the most?

In *Behind Her Eyes* it was definitely Adele - she was slim and fit and stylish and beautiful and also quite bonkers - so she was the most fun to write. I also partly wanted to *be* her, although I'm much more like Louise if I'm honest. In *Cross Her Heart*, as much as I love the adult characters, writing Ava was the best for me. She's a typical sixteen-year-old girl - full of self-absorbed arrogance and so many insecurities all at the same time - a perfect blend of awful and likeable. Everything is so heightened when you're that age that it's great to write.

What was the first scene you wrote or envisioned for the book?

I guess the twist at the end of act one was the first scene I imagined because that is central to the whole book and is key

to what I was fascinated about with the subject matter. But I always start at the beginning so the first scene I wrote was the prologue in the book.

This is your 25th book - does the process get any easier? Do you have a process?

It never feels like it's any easier than the first one but of course it is. You learn where you're fast and where you're slow and when you're really grumpy about it all. So, for example I always have a moment of despondency at about page seventy where I think the whole thing is rubbish and won't pull together or I can't figure out how to make it all work at the end. But, I also know that those moments will pass and once I'm past page 200 I'll be rolling fast towards the end.

You have a dog, Ted, will he be featured in any books in the future?

Ted is a legend! I'm sometimes tempted to write some children's books about him but I always have so much work on. At the moment he's just going to have to settle for internet fame from my Twitter and Facebook. If I didn't have Ted I doubt I'd have any followers at all!

In *Behind Her Eyes*, there are recurring dreams about doors, no spoilers for anyone who hasn't read it (WTF that ending), but have you ever had the door dream?

I really wish I had! I'd hoped that it might have happened while I was writing it, because I was thinking about dreaming so much, but sadly not. I'm a very vivid dreamer though and if I wake up in the middle of a great dream I can go back to sleep and pick up where I left up. So that's probably the next best thing.

You're the queen of twists! Which has been the hardest to get right and do you write them first? As in do you start with a twist and write the book around it?

Ha! That's a nice compliment but I don't see myself that way! I don't think you should ever start with a twist - you should start with a great concept. If a twist comes, then great - if not, you can still have a great book that has brilliant reveals. With both *Behind Her Eyes* and *Cross Her Heart*, the twists were clear to me from the start, but also central to the story and (hopefully) great pay-offs for the stories. A twist should never exist for its own sake without enhancing both the narrative and the reader's enjoyment.

What's your writing process? Do you work from home?

I do work from home which is great but also turns you into a slob very quickly! I spend a lot of time in dog-walking clothes rather than looking like a respectable member of society. I am much better at writing first thing in the morning, but since I've got Ted I no longer start at 7 because I take him for a long walk first, so now it tends to be nearer 9.30. However, I do force myself to work in the afternoon and evening too, although that is often just planning or working on something else - like TV projects or doing Q&As or even boring stuff like accounts. I am a planner so I always have to have the ending in place before I start and I work towards it. I do some broad stroke planning and then plan in more detail as I go along. I see planning as a way of learning what you're NOT going to write. Plans change so much but for me I have to do it so I can keep the book clear in my head.