

DRAWN from LIFE **Sarah P. Blanchard**

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Brilliantly written with strong, imperfect characters.
— Manhattan Book Review

**A gripping narrative of redemption, fortitude and
bravery. 5/5 stars —BookView**

**Impressive debut...A winner. — Prairies Book
Review**

In her debut novel, writer **Sarah P. Blanchard** tackles complex themes of betrayal, abandonment, guilt, and the destructive power of lies.

Blanchard has always been drawn toward flawed, compassionate characters who believe they must battle their demons alone; and complex antagonists who feel they have nothing to lose. She found the spark for her her psychological suspense story **DRAWN FROM LIFE** in an article in *The New Yorker*, “The Sorrow and Shame of the Accidental Killer” (September 11, 2017, by Alice Gregory).

Wanting to learn more about how an ordinary person might learn to live with—or try to fight their way out of—a deep moral injury, Blanchard dug deeper into the traumas people experience when they act, or fail to act, in a way that violates their moral compass.

In **DRAWN FROM LIFE**, Blanchard introduces readers to a troubled family and the unbalanced relationship between two cousins—one an untrustworthy bully, the other a compassionate target. Prairies Book Review says, “Blanchard deftly captures the complexities of human emotion—angst, trauma, remorse, guilt, and ultimate redemption—resonating with readers at every stage of their journey.”

From the back cover:**A life-changing tragedy. Competing memories. Is she a killer or a victim?**

DRAWN FROM LIFE tells the story of twenty-seven-year-old Emma Gillen, the apparent sole survivor of a tragic car crash on a remote Appalachian mountain, who remains haunted nearly a decade later by guilt and grief over the deaths she believes she has caused—but cannot remember.

Then her volatile cousin Lucy returns, needing money and bringing chaos. Emma must decide if she should bargain with the domineering, untrustworthy Lucy—a possible witness to the crash—to uncover the truth.

But all bargains carry risk. As Lucy grows desperate, Emma suspects there's more at stake than just money. Struggling with shame, night terrors, and her own unreliable memory, Emma accepts help from a compassionate detective. But the choice remains hers alone: Can she find the strength to free herself from the danger of her cousin's destructive power, or will Lucy bring everything crashing down?

About the Author:

A native of rural Connecticut, **Sarah P. Blanchard** graduated from the University of Connecticut with a B.A. in literature and from Nichols College in Massachusetts with an M.B.A. in marketing.

Many of her short stories, poems, and essays have been published in magazines and literary journals. She was a finalist for the 2021 Doris Betts Fiction Prize; her short story collection, *Playing Chess with Bulls*, was published in December 2023. Sarah taught writing and communications for five years at the University of Hawaii-Hilo and has led many fiction and poetry workshops. She also taught fiction writing in the College for Seniors program in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of North Carolina-Asheville. She also worked for many years in media with stints as a magazine editor, radio news reporter, textbook editor, and talk show host.

Sarah's debut novel *DRAWN FROM LIFE* is available beginning April 1, 2024, through all local bookstores as well as on [barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com) and Amazon, in paperback and e-book editions. An audiobook will be released later in 2024.

A conversation with Sarah Blanchard, author of *DRAWN FROM LIFE*

Q: Where did the idea for this book begin? What was the writing process like for you?

A: The idea for this story goes way back. When I was in high school, a teenage friend disclosed that his mother had always blamed him for the serious injuries she'd suffered in a car crash. He'd been a few minutes late leaving an after-school event and she'd had to drive around the block a second time, looking for him, and that's when another driver smashed into her car. My friend carried the tragic injustice of this blame into his adult life, emigrating to the other side of the world to escape her undeserved vitriol.

A misplaced belief in agency—that we, or someone close to us, has real control over what happens in our lives—can cause tremendous heartbreak. I wanted to create a story that addressed that, featuring a character that gets stuck in the “should-have” and the “if-only” of regret. That brought me to Alice Gregory's article in *The New Yorker* (“The Shame and Sorrow of the Accidental Killer,” September 11, 2017).

I knew I'd found the core of my main character: an ethical, conscientious young woman burdened with the guilt of an accidental killer. Then I had to figure out how to get her unstuck from that. And I needed a worthy human antagonist to propel the story forward. So Lucy was born.

The actual writing took three and a half years. I added characters and plot twists. Did more research into PTSD, physical trauma, and therapies. I talked with military veterans about moral injury. I also fell in love with my characters and gave them complex backstories. The book grew to 105,000 words and wandered down too many rabbit holes—all fascinating to me, but not all supporting the heart of the story. Editor Annie Mydla brought me back on

track to emphasize the essential story: Emma must find the courage to confront her nemesis. She can have help, but ultimately it's got to be Emma's story.

Q: While DRAWN FROM LIFE is a work of fiction, you depict elements of real-life traumas and the various methods used to help victims of trauma.

A: I'm careful about use of the word "victim." It's become a common, and commonly misused, word. In one sense, everyone can claim victimhood because none of us is fully in charge of what happens in our lives. (The agency problem.) But this can suggest a "learned helplessness," in which we decide that if we have *no* control, we might as well give up. Emma, as the childhood follower and sometimes target of a bully, comes to recognize this in herself. It's at the heart of her battle.

Instead of "victim," I prefer the term "trauma survivor." Therapists use different techniques for different injuries, and this is one example of a therapy that Emma is familiar with called "re-writing the narrative." She cannot change the facts or the outcome of the accident, but she can change how she see her role, how she responds to the facts, and what she will do, going forward.

However, there's an extra stumbling block for Emma. When someone has inadvertently caused irreparable harm, a therapist may advise following the three As: Acknowledge, apologize, amend. But Emma can't remember enough to acknowledge what truly happened. She's stuck on the "apologize" phase without fully understanding what she's apologizing for. This need to know what really happened drives her to try bargaining with her cousin for the truth—thus propelling the story to its climax.

Q: How did you determine whose perspective would drive the story?

A: I first thought the story belonged entirely to Emma, so I began it in first person. But I quickly realized I needed more of her cousin's perspective to expose the dark side of the family dynamics. With only Emma's perspective, we'd remain as much in the dark as Emma herself is for much of the story.

Lucy's character was the most interesting to consider but the hardest to write. How dark is too dark? What can she reveal without revealing everything?

Chaz, the third point-of-view character, kind of snuck in on me. I was intrigued by what his life might look like, growing up in a foster home, and how he might perceive the

survivor of the accident. His character fit very neatly into the “watcher in the wings” role and I really enjoyed bringing in his backstory and perspective.

Q: Your detective doesn’t appear until the second half of the book. Why?

A: He’s riding shotgun, not driving the story. I needed a police presence to move certain things forward but it’s Emma’s story, not his. Maybe he’ll have a stronger role in the next book. Or he could have his own book.

Q: Tell us about your connection to western North Carolina.

A: My husband and I first visited western North Carolina in 2013, three years after we moved to Raleigh from Hilo, Hawai‘i. We fell immediately in love with the Blue Ridge Mountains and also with Asheville. At heart, I’m a farm girl not a city girl, so we found a home next to cattle farms on the outskirts of Weaverville, just north of Asheville.

The opening scenes in this book depict a remote hunter’s cabin on a fictional mountain called Bishops Knob. I’ve ridden horses on many gravel roads just like the one in the book—narrow and winding, with steep drop-offs and hairpin turns. One lane, no guardrails. In winter, snow and ice make these tracks treacherous or completely impassable.

In writing about this, it struck me that the mountain roads in Appalachia can seem similar to many of the mountain roads in remote areas of the Big Island of Hawai‘i, where Emma’s detective is from. Different vegetation and rock formations, of course, but equally as treacherous.

Some of my favorite memories of childhood are times spent in the woods and fields of New England, where the natural world held—and still holds—a deep fascination for me.

Q: Who are among your favorite writers, books, and influences?

A: We have so many marvelous writers here in the South. Ron Rash, Wiley Cash, and Charles Frazier are three of my favorites, for their strong sense of place and the way they use place to build character.

Another writer special to me is Barbara Kingsolver, for those same elements but also the larger sweep of her stories through the passage of time—most notably in *Demon Copperhead*. Delia Owen’s *Where the Crawdads Sing* is also a favorite of mine, for her lyrical

depictions of the natural world and the girl who grows and draws strength from it. On the grittier side of the mystery genre, Jonathan Kellerman's psychology-steeped suspense stories have always intrigued me.

My parents were my best and earliest storytellers. I was born late in their lives, after four much-older siblings had grown and moved away. I enjoyed the reflective and solitary life of an only child—but with a far-flung extended family and experienced, at-ease parents who shared their love of the natural world, encouraged my creativity, and (usually) celebrated my independent spirit.

And of course there's my husband Rich, grammar grinch and proofreader extraordinaire, who prefers science fiction but always has a bottle of bubbly on hand in the fridge for every small success.

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Reviews for *Drawn from Life*

Brilliantly written with strong, imperfect characters, Emma's story will have readers taking in all of the small details from cover to cover. With themes of family, betrayal, narcissism, and hope, readers will experience a myriad of emotions while reading *Drawn from Life*. —**Kristi Elizabeth, Manhattan Book Review**

An accomplished debut... As the novel hurtles towards its unforeseen finale, Blanchard deftly captures the complexities of human emotion—angst, trauma, remorse, guilt, and ultimate redemption—resonating with readers at every stage of their journey. **A winner.** — **The Prairies Book Review** <https://theprairiesbookreview.com/?p=18157&=1>

Blanchard's leisurely prose exudes a palpable sense of conviction, carrying readers effortlessly into the intricate world of her vibrant characters and the ruggedly beautiful landscape of North Carolina.... [T]his literary tale makes for a gripping narrative of redemption, fortitude, and bravery. **5/5 stars — BookView Review**
<https://bookviewreview.com/2024/02/21/book-review-drawn-from-life-a-novel-by-sarah-p-blanchard/>

Drawn from Life* thrusts us into a world of vivid, complex and relatable characters.** ...Underlying all is the theme of our inability to see ourselves and our family objectively: focusing on the worst parts of ourselves, yet the best of others. I was rooting for Emma the whole way through. —**Rachel Graham, author of the YA novel *Follow Me

Author Interviews

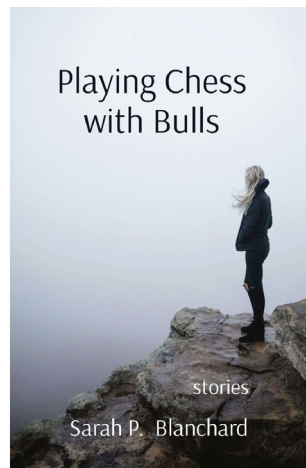
Link to 2/21/24 author interview on BookView Review:

<https://bookviewreview.com/2024/02/21/interview-with-author-sarah-p-blanchard/>

Also by Sarah P. Blanchard

Playing Chess with Bulls (December 2023)

ISBN 979-8-8690-2556-2



Praise for Sarah P. Blanchard's *Playing Chess with Bulls*:

“[The story ‘Lizzy Baby’ is] a controlled, haunting tale of abuse and betrayal [and] a damning look at the ways that people refuse to see what they don't want to see. Blanchard's prose is precise and economical. Liz is a well-drawn and compelling protagonist, which makes her many trials that much harder for the reader to stomach. ...This is a dark story that clearly telegraphs where it's going.” —**Kirkus Reviews**

“[The first story] signals that the author won't be pulling any punches. These stories have a strong sense of place...Blanchard takes us to stables and kitchen tables, often showing the hard truth of living when hope is in short supply. The title story ‘Playing Chess with Bulls’ ... portrays farm life well: ‘All that rural-kid life that’s supposed to make up for

having parents who earned too little and fought too much.” — **Kathleen Patrick, Amazon bestselling author of *The Shoe Box Waltz***

“Sarah Blanchard’s *Playing Chess With Bulls* dishes out hope and regrets in helpings that mirror life. Her characters...are often in need of salvation or doing their best to do the saving. The result often is lifelines grabbed or missed, with the pain, joy or indecision that results from that. Her characters are complex but real.”— **Dan Ward, former Managing Editor, *Asheville Times***

“Masterful storytelling. Had me roped in from the first sentence, and then I couldn't turn pages fast enough. As a poet, love Blanchard's language; as a reader, smitten by the vivid images.” — **Emily S.**

“*Playing Chess with Bulls* starts smoothly with love and failure and quickly moves to tougher themes—the death of a child and the agonizing descent into suicide. This book grabbed hold and wouldn’t let go even though I had turned away from fiction since my son died. Read it if you want to see how real-world characters get past the unimaginable. You will live through them, and Blanchard will take you to hell and back.” —**Whitehorserider**