

## Ep #45: Get to Know Me: My Story



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Sarah Michelle**

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Ben: Hello everybody, I'd like to introduce myself as your host today. I am Mr. Sarah Michelle, the lovely husband of Sarah. And for today, I have finally convinced my wife to allow me to interview her on her own pod.

I'm so excited to be with you guys today to share some insider knowledge and dig into the real life and give some background knowledge of Sarah Michelle. So, for starters, I'm on the front porch in the cold while Sara is in her podcast studio, so I don't interfere with her audio. So hello, Sarah. How are you tonight?

Sarah: I'm positive this is going to be an adventure to say the least.

Ben: Absolutely. Have you done anything exciting today?

Sarah: Today was our what we call post-Thanksgiving because during real Thanksgiving, my immediate family all had Covid but one. And everybody got out of quarantine the day before Thanksgiving, and I was like, "I am not doing that." So today our exciting feat was having Thanksgiving at our brand new house.

Ben: That's right. I cannot think of anything better than having your mother show up at six o'clock this morning to start cooking Thanksgiving dinner at our house. And wasn't that just the greatest?

Sarah: It was a joy. That's how I'll put it, it was a joy to be woken up at 6:30 with her and her puppy and my grandfather at the front door.

Ben: That's right. That's right. We were so happy to have them, weren't we?

Sarah: Yes, we were ecstatic. I had been up for three hours at that point, it was great.

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Ben: That's right. So I sort of just wanted to introduce the version of Sarah that I personally know to your audience. So I figured I would start at the beginning if that's okay.

Sarah: Oh, like beginning beginning?

Ben: Is that okay?

Sarah: What beginning? Yeah, I guess that's fine.

Ben: Yeah. Yeah. So, obviously your journey started as a nurse. So did you always grow up planning to be a nurse? Or did you do the usual college thing where you change majors seven times, accidentally just ended up in nursing because that was the quickest path to graduation? How did you end up in nursing?

Sarah: Oh, man. So my gut instinct was to say, "Hell no, I didn't always intend on being a nurse." Actually, for a really long time, probably as long as I can remember I wanted to be a teacher. As you obviously know, both my parents are teachers. And as I grew up, they didn't super love teaching. So they were like, "Maybe you should pick something else."

And I couldn't totally decide what I wanted to do. But I got some exposure to the healthcare realm when I was a teenager. And I'm like, "I feel like I could be a nurse." My experience with nurses was being up at 2am, my grandmother is sick laying in a hospital bed, and they're feeding me ice cream. And I'm like, "I could feed people ice cream, that's something I could see myself doing."

And so whenever I was about to graduate high school, the college near me, the University of Kentucky, they pretty much had a fast track into their program. So if you had a high enough ACT score and a high enough GPA and everything else, they were like, "If you do mostly well your first year, we'll guarantee you get into the nursing program."

And so getting rid of all that uncertainty of what I get in what I not definitely kind of grabbed me quick. And so I didn't even like think about doing pre-

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med or anything like that anymore. I was like, "I've got the guarantee, this is how I'm going to go."

Ben: Gotcha. So you kind of stomped on my next question, which was how did you end up with your passion for educating? So I guess we'll take a little detour. And so it was really the ice cream in the hospital that drew you to nursing?

Sarah: Well, I feel like if anyone offers me ice cream, they can pretty much convince me to do anything. But that was definitely the starting point.

Ben: The secret to marrying Sarah was the willingness to go to Dairy Queen at any hour of any day, am I right?

Sarah: Yes, anytime. Yes, literally anytime. Last night I'm like, "I know we just saw our personal trainer for the first time today and we are dying in soreness, I have to go to Dairy Queen. I have to have the candy cane chill blizzard."

Ben: I don't care that it's a 50 minute round trip, right?

Sarah: No, I have to have that treat.

Ben: 50 minutes there and back, it's worth it for the blizzard, that's right.

Sarah: Absolutely, every time.

Ben: So how did you end up as a nurse educator before you ended up as an NP?

Sarah: I kind of want to say by accident a little bit. Not totally, but I had really struggled in the middle of my nursing program, and I'd had a really tough time. And I just genuinely felt at that time like my instructors didn't believe in me, they didn't think I had it in me to be a nurse. Which, obviously I love to prove people wrong, so I was like, "I'm going to be a nurse no matter what now, whether I want to do this or not."

But my senior year of college, one of my instructors just was asking around, she's like, "Hey, can anyone tutor this diver?" And I was like, "A

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diver?” And they're like, “Yeah, it would be sports tutoring, like you would—” They don't do a lot of sports tutoring for nursing students, because most nursing students can't handle a full time sport as well, which is understandable.

But there was a diver and there was a volleyball player, and they both wanted to be nurses. And so I started working with those two students and I kind of got my feet under me. And I was like, “I like this so much more than any job I've ever had in my life. How can I do this more?” Especially because I was getting paid a lot better for it.

And so then I started my own side gig because, like I said, there were only two students that were athletes and in nursing school at the time. And so I started tutoring one of her friends and then I started tutoring their friends, then I started tutoring their friends. I was doing group tutoring one on one tutoring.

I mean, I was easily tutoring like 30 to 40 students. And I'm like, “I wish I could just do this all day every day.” Because to watch these students light up like this, to watch them have the confidence going into their exams, which was definitely like something I lacked myself until I figured out that really tough course, it just absolutely lit me up in all the ways. I'm like, “I just want to do this. I don't even want to be a nurse and I'm not even a nurse yet.” But I've got to finish this degree at this point, right?

Ben: Yeah, absolutely. So, like the overachiever that you are, you just stomped on my next question. But so anyway, part of what I love about you is your grind. So I guess my backstory to that story was that you were a manager at the student center. And you are working 40, 50 plus hours a week while you were in nursing school. And then the laws changed, and they had to provide you health care if you were working that many hours.

So instead of being able to work your hours, they cut you way back. And then you started alternating with tutoring and fixing that. And didn't you end up quitting that job as the student center manager?

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Sarah: Oh yeah, I quit all the jobs. As soon as I got any momentum with tutoring, I was like, “This is so much better. I set my own schedule. I make my own money. It doesn't get better than this. I'm just going to dive headfirst.”

Ben: Yeah. So where did that that grind— Your grind is one of the things that I personally admire the most about you. Where did that grind come from? Was it just instilled? Or is it part of who you are? Did you develop it? Where did that come from?

Sarah: Oh man, I think the grind comes from a lot of places. I mean, number one, I had parents that were teachers who then went to— There was a stint in time where they would teach during the day and then go work at Kmart at night. There's another stint in time where they would teach during the day go work at Lowe's at night.

And so I saw the side hustle, like the beginnings of what a side hustle could be. So I think that definitely kind of gave me at least the exposure to the grind. I think in some ways my OCD gives me a little bit of grind as well. I want to keep going, I like the momentum. I enjoy that it keeps my mind busy when I'm hustling. So it's too fold.

Ben: So your OCD enjoys progress?

Sarah: Oh yeah, I love progress.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, I understand we just kind of got to swivel like a snake and get in where we fit in. We've talked about how you fit into your niche all the time in the past. So I guess my question to you is, what was it about AANP and ANCC that made you decide that people needed more help in the test prep space? What was it about these two exams that you decided like, this is where there's help needed?

Sarah: There was nothing out there to serve me as a student. And I genuinely, wholeheartedly mean that every time I say it because, I mean, I was taking review courses out there that say test anxiety doesn't exist. And when you're a person with massive anxiety and someone's standing up

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there at the beginning of a review, and they're like, "Test anxiety doesn't exist, if you fail it's on you." I mean, it absolutely ripped you apart.

And so I had had a lot of anxiety before my NCLEX. But at that point, I had been tutoring for so long, like I can remember I just did 1,000 practice questions. And I'm like, "If I don't know it by now after tutoring it all these hours, I'm never going to know it. So I mean, it just is what it is."

But my anxiety with the nurse practitioner exam was a lot bigger, I felt a lot more pressure with it. And that's how I ended up completing so many different reviews, which I ended up, obviously, regretting because I just kept looking for that review that was going to give me confidence. That review that was going to bring down my anxiety.

And it was like every time I completed a review, and you obviously know this because you lived with me at this time, my anxiety just grew and grew and grew. I mean, I've said on the podcast before, my hair was falling out, but literally my hair was falling out. I was so stressed, I was studying all the time, doing questions all the time. I mean, heck, I was taking walks and trying to do like 200 practice question sets and listening to reviews. I mean, it was insanity because I couldn't find what I needed.

And that's how I was like, "okay, if I need this, there's at least one other person out in the world that needs this." When I took the exam, I was literally just like, "I can't believe I did all this for this. This wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it was going to be."

My anxiety was so much bigger than the content, right? So I created it for myself in a lot of ways. And apparently, there are a lot of me's out there, a lot of people with test anxiety, and I just didn't realize it at the time.

Ben: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, one of the periods in our relationship, our life together that I will never forget is the last semester that you spent in NP school.

Sarah: The worst.

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Ben: Because where I come from, I mean, I'm kind of a procrastinator. I like to wait on things and do them at the last minute. And your last semester started, and you started preparing for your exams in January. You didn't graduate until May and you're like, "I got to start with these books."

And all of a sudden these 17 pound textbooks started showing up in the mail. And you memorized all of these, and you bought all these apps. And so I just want to say that I am so proud of what you have built.

My favorite part of your success is that you have built all of your courses in your image. And not only that, but your company and all of your employees that you have, work in your image. And unfortunately, you are not unique. There are more people out there who are like you, and these stressors and everything that goes on in our lives, whether it be getting married six months before you graduate from school—

Sarah: That is a bad decision.

Ben: Taking finals 48 hours after you get back from your honeymoon.

Sarah: Also a bad decision.

Ben: Yeah. I mean, having children while you're in school. These are just the realities of graduate school and graduate school in the nurse practitioner space. And so, like I said, you are not unique and I'm so proud that you have shared yourself and your experiences with the world. I won't make you respond to that.

Sarah: Well I was going to say, as always my husband is way too sweet to me all the time. Which is why he's my husband.

Ben: No, no, I'm sitting outside in the cold.

Sarah: Mr. Sarah Michelle.

Ben: That's right, Mr. Sarah Michelle. So moving on, what is next for Sarah Michelle personally, Sarah Michelle NP Reviews the company? What do



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you have in the works for the rest of the year, early next year? What do you got moving?

Sarah: We have so many plans. We've got so many things going on behind the scenes. I don't want to share too much because I think it's a little bit too soon, but we are working on the expansion of our company to more than just nurse practitioners. So you can make what you want of that. And that will be coming out early next year, probably at the end of the first quarter.

And alongside that, so we're expanding a little bit outside of nurse practitioners. But we're also like beyond close, like I can taste it, I can see it to releasing something for our students that I really feel like is going to be the bow on top of the courses. And so if I'm lucky, and I am fortunate, and things go as planned, that will be coming out in next few weeks as well.

I will let you know that it does involve practice questions, but I won't really say a lot more than that. But I also will say it was supposed to release September 1st and it's December now, so I've been waiting just as long as you guys and you guys didn't even know you're waiting at the time.

But I think the extra wait is good, we've really gotten the features in it that we want. And I would never want to release anything out there that isn't 100% ready. There is nothing that— For me, there's that phrase, done is better than perfect, and I can appreciate that. But with this particular project and the skill that we're going to be releasing it, done was not better than perfect for me. I wanted it to be at its fullest capacity.

And then I think personal life wise, just thinking about me and my husband, we actually just moved to like a 20 acre farm. So we're kind of figuring out our new life here and our new momentum. We've been talking about maybe some animals, maybe some babies in the future, maybe some— I'm trying to think, my husband does a lot of deer hunting.

Ben: Which is why I'm okay out in the cold for this interview.

Sarah: You do love the farm. You absolutely love the farm.

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Ben: Yeah.

Sarah: But I think there's a lot more to do in this space. And I want to be able to touch more students and help more students. That's what it really boils down to at the end of the day, that is always the biggest goal.

Something I was talking about at a quarterly meeting here recently with my employees is I never want to release something just to release something. Like I never want to release something that students feel like they have to buy that they don't actually need.

And so the things that are coming are definitely things I feel are gaps and I feel like they are things that our students need. And as always super, super important to me as we move forward too, because when you have a community of this size there's so many things you can do. And there's so many people coming at you from so many different angles with all these different ideas.

But the core of our business is helping students and helping you guys. And so I want to figure out in 2022 how do we do that in the best way possible? And I think we've got a really good plan in place. I kind of got on a tangent.

Ben: No, no, it's okay. So I'll just try to summarize your tangent.

Sarah: Good luck.

Ben: So just so I'm personally clear, I think you might have something—

Sarah: We're going to buy alpacas.

Ben: I think you might have something in the next month or two that might involve practice questions—

Sarah: Uh-huh, maybe, kind of, sort of.

Ben: And potentially be available in the App Store for your nurse practitioner students.

Sarah: Yeah, maybe.

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Ben: Is that is that potentially in the works?

Sarah: Oh, dear Lord, I hope so. I hope so, so much.

Ben: And so in the years to come, you might be reaching out to other types of students, potentially undergrad students. Is that right?

Sarah: No, no, no, I'm not giving all the details away. But I will say, like I said before, there are a lot more students out there to be served. And I know that when I was a nursing student, I was under served. And there were things I needed and resources I needed that I just genuinely did not have. And there wasn't anybody there for me in that space.

So I'm excited to see what I can change about that. I have like this lofty internal goal of maybe one day we changed the whole scheme of nursing education from the ground up. But that's a later goal, not a today goal.

Ben: Absolutely, absolutely. I so appreciate that everything you say turns back to the student and the resources.

Sarah; Always.

Ben: And what can I do to help other people? So, with that being said, is your husband going to get his chickens in the spring finally, that he's been talking about for years? It feels like decades, I'm not even 30 yet, but it feels like—

Sarah: We've not been together for a decade.

Ben: We've been half that long, and I've always wanted the chickens. Now that we have the farm, can we finally have the chickens?

Sarah: I do want to clarify that he was trying to have chickens when we literally lived in a subdivision, and we were going to have to put them in the backyard where the dogs could get to them.

Ben: Absolutely, I love my scrambled eggs in the morning and chickens are a part of that, you know what I mean?

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Sarah: I'll just say we have to see about the chickens. I'm definitely on board if you want to get some alpacas, you know we've been talking about alpacas for a long time. My parents used to live next to an alpaca farm. But we can see what happens in the spring, alpacas, chickens, maybe.

Ben: Okay. Well, I'll just say alpacas don't produce eggs.

Sarah: But they're so cute.

Ben: I'll digress. A discussion for another day. A discussion for another day.

Sarah: Yeah, probably this will be our before going to bed discussion, alpacas.

Ben: That's right, we'll continue this in about a half an hour. But so I guess my last couple of questions, I personally know that you're really proud of the value that you've been able to provide to the NP world and to students everywhere.

Do you think that you're going to continue to be bringing value to the healthcare world forever? Or are you just going to write an autobiography one day and just retire off of the proceeds? Are you just going to tell your story and then live your life? What are your plans for the future?

Sarah: Well, you know I would love to write a book. I've always wanted to write a book. I've been planning on writing a book, since literally, I feel like I was 10. I wrote fake books, is what I called them. But I'm not really sure at this point.

I feel like there's still a lot open and it's really hard in this business to predict what's coming next. We have some really great plans for 2022, but there's probably also going to be a lot of pivoting that happens in 2022 as new opportunities become available. And I think there's going to continue to happen or next decade or even the decade after that.

So I feel like for me, at my core, I love educating so much there's no way I could ever like completely step away from it. I don't feel like I would feel

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whole or feel like myself if I did. But I can envision a future where I spend a good solid year writing a book.

So we'll just kind of see what happens.

Ben: I got you, I got you. Well, I just want to say that I have very much enjoyed the opportunity to interview you.

Sarah: You're so silly.

Ben: And I just want to say, again, in public, how proud I am of you and how excited I am to see where you and your company end up in the future. The sky is the limit. But, again, I am privileged to have been here. And signing off, maybe one day I will see you guys again. But this is Mr. Sarah Michelle.

Sarah: I feel like my students are going to be like, "What just happened on this episode?" But I like getting to do something a little bit different too. Almost all the podcasts I do, as you know, I sit, and I write myself a script to make sure everything's really planned. So I've been having like this itch to do something a little bit more free spirited.

And as I'm sure you guys can tell, I have the sweetest husband in the world. I mean, he's like 50 feet away from me, I want to run and give him a hug right now, which I'm about to do. So I appreciate you taking the time to interview me so I could scratch my itch.

Ben: Absolutely. It's been the most fun. I've enjoyed it.

Sarah: Yeah, and as I say at the end of all my episodes, this like my signature phrase. I don't know how far you listen in, Ben, he listens to most of them. I'll talk to you guys next week.

Ben: Absolutely, maybe I'll talk to you guys again one week in the future.

Sarah: I was going to say not next week probably, but maybe a week in the future.

Ben: Absolutely.

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Sarah: All right, I'm going to meet you on the porch.

As an extra bonus, friends, if you're looking for support no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in, I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit [stressfreenp.com](https://stressfreenp.com). See you next week.