

THE RESISTANCE – EPISODE 22

Sarah Siskind interview – Episode Transcript

Matt: Hello and welcome to The Resistance. My name is Matt Conner, and I'm your host. Today I'm privileged to sit across from singer-songwriter Sarah Siskind.

I'd love to begin where we begin each of our episodes on The Resistance. It's based on the work *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield. Pressfield writes this: "Most of us have two lives: the life we live, and the un-lived life within us. And between the two stands the resistance." Sarah, I'd just love to know for you how you resonate with that quote at this point in your life, personal or professional.

Sarah: Yeah. I could probably talk to you about resistance for hours. And it's even more so now, right? So I know you started this podcast before the pandemic. I think there's a whole added layer now to how I will respond to that quote. But I've found that what I've struggled with before the pandemic, I still struggle with as far as what holds me back. And the main thing is time. Time management. That's my biggest struggle, and it's gotten worse. A lot of folks have a lot of free time on their hands now. And for me, it kind of went the opposite way, because I've got two kids as you understand, being a dad. I've got a seven- and a four-year-old who have been out of school, and that just turns it all upside down.

I struggled with time management when my daughter was in school all day and my son was at preschool, and he had after-school programs. So my kiddos were pretty much taken care of during the week, and I had full days, for the most part, when I was home, to do what I needed to do to take care of my business and myself and however my day needed to go. Even in that era, pre-pandemic, I struggled with time management. And I'll tell you what I mean by that is just, as a creative, we don't operate on normal times. And so I would rather follow my muse and have several days of clean slate calendar open, free time to see where my muse takes me. And sort of organically be inspired and respond to inspiration.

When you're having to pick the kids up and get them, cook dinner and do bath and all that stuff, and then the mornings it's the same routine, and you know you've got school functions and the gymnastics and all this. It's challenging. That being said, I wouldn't trade my kids for anything in the world, and I wanted to be a mother more than anything, and I'm ever grateful that I am. But I tend to have way more ideas than I can handle, and I'm an Aries, and I get real fired up. And I get real excited about a creative project, and I start chasing it. And sort of lose perspective on all the other projects that I started that maybe somebody actually needs me to finish by a certain day. So I struggled with that a lot pre-pandemic, and I try to take my own advice.

I do some creative consulting. I have like a creative coaching thing I do that I love to do, and I still do it via Zoom and Skype and what have you. And I also teach at Brevard College, songwriting, and I tell my students and my clients how to manage their time, but I have a hard time doing it myself. And so it's a constant struggle for me. With the pandemic, it's just magnified. So I'm really glad that I had an album release fall sort of right hand in hand with this time. That sounds weird, because a lot of folks who've interviewed me are like, "Oh, I'm so sorry that this is happening right when your album's coming out." Well yeah, the tour got canceled, that's true, but it's so much more than that to put out a record.

For me, I actually, somehow I feel like it was a blessing, the timing. Because people have more time to listen to music. And I think music is becoming much more of a lifeline for people right now than maybe it has been for the last 5-10 years where people's lives have just gotten busier and busier and busier. Maybe

we're taking a little more time now to be more vulnerable, because we're all struggling and we're all looking to each other to lift each other up. So that's a good time to be releasing music, I think. So I've had that as a really, Modern Appalachia, my new album, has been an anchor for me during this time and has been a blessing, because I haven't had to necessarily navigate a bunch of different projects, which I usually have my hand in a lot of different things. But this has provided me focus.

That being said, I still struggle with the time management thing. Not only just trying to give my attention to my creative impulses, but forgiving myself for not, if that makes sense. I feel a certain responsibility, as a creative being, to kind of dig in when inspiration strikes. And the reality is, I can't right now. Because my family is the most important. And my kids are, like all kids right now, are experiencing a really unstable and confusing time as well.

So I need to be as present and strong for them as I can, so I can't necessarily be twirling around in a skirt, dancing to my new song idea, if they need me. So that's been the biggest challenge for me. I'm lucky that I don't necessarily lack inspiration. I get inspired every day by lots of things. And I'm trying to kind of do it justice. But yeah, that's my resistance, really.

Matt: Tell me this. Is there an honest place for some resentment there? And how do you deal with that? Is that something that you deal with? I'm only projecting my own. I love being a dad, and yet in your worst moments, you're like, "ugh I hate having to deal with this." I mean you really don't, in the scheme of things, but....

Sarah: Sure. Absolutely. Yeah. I don't know that I have processed it on my end as resentment, but I know that feeling, sure. I'll be standing in my kitchen at 7 in the morning, which I'm not a morning person, so you start there. And my kids' dad and I are not together anymore, so when I have the kids, I'm a single mom. So I'm in my kitchen, haven't even had a second to make coffee, and I'm buttering toast for my 4-year-old, who's like, "Mom! I want juice! Mom, I've got to go potty. Mom! I want to watch a cartoon! Mom!" You know how it is. And that's just one of the two kids.

Yet in those moments, for sure, I mean I do have my days where I feel just very centered and grounded and just sort of very go-with-the-flow and grateful. And in those moments, I'm able to, "Sure honey. Let me also offer you a hug and kiss while I do that for you." But that doesn't happen every day. So I do have those moments. Often while I'm in the kitchen, providing snacks and meals, I have that feeling come up, where like, gosh I would kill to be in a room by myself with my guitar right now. I have so many ideas that I not only have never been able to pursue, and I'm talking about song ideas and other ideas, but that I may never pursue. And that's something I have to just live with. S

o yeah, in that sense, I would probably categorize that as resentment. But you know, I had this thought the other day where I was like, what I don't want to do is be at my kid's high school graduation years down the road and feel like I just got through it. Because that's how I feel right now. Especially being a single parent. It has given me just a huge new understanding for single parents out there. It's really daunting. And like I said, I do feel like I'm often just getting through it and not being in it. And that's something that all the time management for my creative musing in the world, even if I had that all lined up and down and perfectly, it wouldn't be as important as my time with my kids.

So I really am just constantly just pulling myself back to center. Constantly reminding myself that these moments with my kids. At their age, I remembered all this. So they will too. These are moments that they

will carry with them. So yeah. I think maybe I have resentment, and then the guilt comes in and washes it away, and then it's just guilt, and then it turns into some half-assed presence.

Matt: Let me ask you this, because we're talking about resistance. And I think a lot of people will be able to relate to what you're talking about. Not only in terms of time, and the feeling of limitations versus what we want to do, but when you said earlier, "I tend to have a lot of ideas." Not even just musical ideas but creative ideas in general, or entrepreneurial ideas, or whatever it is. When you know you're dealing with time limitations, when you know you're dealing with hey, look, I'm a mom with two kids. There's only so many things I can take on. How do you decide in what ways to spend the limited capital you have, capital in terms of time and effort and even money, versus to let other things that may be good fall away?

Sarah: Sure. I totally get what you're after. There's a lot that comes into play when I make that decision. And I'll be honest with you that sometimes I'm in such a whirlwind, like on days when I have my kids and I'm still trying to keep up with what I have to do for work, I don't even have the time to make that decision. So I have to kind of put it on hold until days when they're with their dad, and I can sit for a minute and think and process.

The main thing that I lean on, possibly in my life, is intuition. And my intuition and my faith kind of go hand in hand. I feel like when I have a really strong intuition about something, then I take that to God in prayer, and then I see what he has to say about it and sort of how that intuition changes. If it flares up and gets even hotter, or if it dies down. So that's kind of my umbrella of decision-making, is my intuition. And sort of like I said, prayer. But I have to factor in money. We all have to. I have to factor in, it's never really a deciding factor, but now more than ever, because I lost my tour. I definitely had budgeted that income into my year. And now it's gone. So when I'm bouncing around with all these ideas of things I could do, I do have to stir into the pot the monetary possibilities of said ideas.

So I think, I have to have a lot of meetings with myself. I sit down with myself and I talk to myself. And my new thing, I've tried everything for time management and making decisions about what to spend my time on. I've done Google Calendar, what usually works best for me is to write with a pen and a paper on a notepad, sort of like an hour by hour schedule for the day to keep myself on track.

Now my new thing is sticky notes, which seems like I'm going backwards, but I actually really like it. So every time I have an idea, I write it on a sticky note. I'm going to look right now what I have on my table. One, two, three, four, five. Five right now. Oh wait, there's a sixth one hiding. I sit down and I just have to kind of go through, kind of take things week by week. It all revolves around my kids. Number one, are my kids where they need to be? Are they taken care of for the next week? Okay. If that's a yes, then I move on to myself. And I'm like, so. About how many hours a day do I think I have? Okay, next. Once I have that piece, it's like, okay. Look at these six sticky notes and just honestly bring the intuitive arm in, and then the responsible I-have-to-make-a-living arm in, and then bring, you know, also does this idea support what I'm doing right now? Does this fit with the fact that I just released a new album? And I have my own little personal board meeting. And then I just kind of go from there.

Now usually, that's about as far as I get, and I'm interrupted by something. So I really just have to constantly be checking in with myself about time and what's feeling most important. And when I get overwhelmed, and I can't figure it out, I pray. And I usually get an answer. So it's nothing concrete that I can tell you. It's more of just sort of like that hurry up and wait thing. I feel like I'm just spinning around like a top most of the time, and then I sit and go to actually plan that stuff out. And then I'm kind of like,

wait, what was I doing? I just want to take a nap. So it's kind of all over the place, I've gotta say. And when my kids were in school, when I wasn't traveling, which you know, I was traveling a lot. I've always traveled a good amount, because if I'm not on tour, I would go to Nashville every four to six weeks. But if I was home for Monday through Friday, I would attempt, the key word is attempt, to assign certain things to certain days, like Friday is office day, bill day, make sure your credit cards are paid for the month. And the light bill. This kind of thing. And then if you're done with that, you can sit down with your guitar. And then maybe Tuesdays was always a creative day, where I tried to allow for the muse on Tuesdays. And so that was helpful, but that's all gone, Matt. That doesn't exist.

Matt: No more muse days.

Sarah: Exactly. So yeah. So I wish I had a real concrete method.

Matt: No, I like the messiness of this. And I actually want to ask about that. Because you are referencing these, quote, "meetings with yourself." And it sounds like a space in which you're used to, and that you're comfortable with. But what I love so much about this new album, *Modern Appalachia*, is this vulnerability that actually seems to depict you as this protagonist who's not comfortable with being alone. I guess I'm just thinking of some of these lines from, let's say, like the first track is "Me and Now," right? You're sort of afraid of asking the questions of your own self that you would tell someone else to do, etc. When you talk about these meetings with yourself, how comfortable are you, really? And have you grown more comfortable as you continue to have them?

Sarah: Well, this is a division of my pie, which I will explain what that means. I kind of feel like I'm made up of multiple pieces of pie. One piece is music/career. One piece is mother. And one piece is woman/human. And when I'm having these meetings with myself that I'm telling you about, I'm in my music/career piece of pie. I've been doing that, I've been having meetings with myself about my music since I was about 14. I started doing this professionally now about almost 20 years ago. So I'm really used to being alone with myself when it comes to creativity as it applies to me as a musician.

Now, that being said, I have never been alone until two years ago. Like literally alone as in not in a marriage or relationship. So I've been married twice. I got married really young the first time. And there wasn't a whole lot of time between getting out of that marriage and into my second marriage. I was with my first husband, I met him when I was seventeen. So two years ago when I had a separation from my kids' dad and bought a house, that was the first time I had been alone. I think I had maybe lived for like a couple weeks by myself once in an apartment, between other living spaces.

So it's pretty unusual to be in your 40s and to be alone for the first time. And that's what this album, that's what "Me and Now" is about. And it's really about that piece of my pie, and not really the music/career side of myself. And that's why this album feels so vulnerable, because I'm really addressing a lot about who I am and my place in the world beyond who I am as a singer-songwriter and artist and this kind of thing. So to answer your question, I haven't been comfortable being alone. I've really struggled with it.

And it's interesting, because I mentioned it to my mom the other day, because my parents also live in Brevard. And I'm still struggling with it. When my kids aren't here, sometimes it's really hard for me to be alone in the house at night. And I mentioned that to her, and she said that I was like that since I was a kid. And I had forgotten that. When she brought it up, it brought back some memories of even when I was

an older teenager, you would think that I would be mature enough to not be scared, but I was terrified to be in the house by myself. And so that's what I've been looking at. I'm trying to face that and see what that's about. And honestly, just since the pandemic, I've started to come through and out the other side. If you had interviewed me six months ago, I would probably say I'm still scared to be in the house by myself. And some of that may pull from some of my trauma from my past. And it also parlays into the topic of mental health. And I struggle with anxiety disorder, which is often, most times a mysterious thing to go through.

And so "Me and Now" is definitely sort of my anthem to that part of sort of myself discovery of, you know, I find in the last two years since I've been having to sit in silence without any buffer or somebody else to kind of distract me, I've had to have that feeling come up of sort of fear and anxiety. And resist the urge to start thinking about, like it says in the song, somebody else in my life who might have a bigger problem than me that I can go help, then I can feel better about myself. And then they might feel better, and then everything is better. That's a good quality to have, but it's not necessarily pointing you in the direction of self-care. Self-care has always been really hard for me. And that's another thing that's really helped me kind of come out of this sort of fear shell that I can be in when I'm by myself, is just really kind of taking better care of myself in general. So yeah. I'm still kind of getting my legs with that.

Matt: Let me ask this. And I'm hoping this question makes sense. Using your pie analogy before, as you're used to sort of like, okay I'll try to get creative on Tuesdays, and you have this practice to interact with the muse or allow something to happen there creatively. Is that part of the pie helping you work with this other part? Like you said, "Six months ago if you would have asked me, I would have had a different answer." Does channeling some of this through the muse and that part of yourself help you reach a healthier place on this other part?

Sarah: Yes. It does. And that's why it's really dangerous for me if I go too long without being creative. And I've had those moments where I'm really irritable and edgy and nothing seems right, and then I think to myself, when was the last time I sat down and played guitar? And I'm like, oh no. That's way too long. Now, granted, that hasn't been the case lately because of all the online concerts and things I've been doing, which is great because it keeps me active in that space.

But yeah, my life as a musician and a songwriter, I've never thought about it this way, but it's much more put together than my life as a woman and a human. Because I've always been coupled off, so I've always existed in a space with a partner. And so I've sort of filtered my views of the world and my perspectives through whoever I was sharing my life with, whereas my music and my career was always mine. It was only mine. And I've had a really hard time. People will tell you. I'm really picky about who's on my team and who I work with, because I'm really driven and I have a really pretty clear idea of what I want to do musically and in my career.

So I would say that I pull some confidence over from one piece of the pie to the other. I can pull some confidence from my music over to the other piece of pie that's still growing and feel a little bit better about myself. Because I do feel like, as chaotic as it is and as hard as it is to find a time to pursue everything I want to, I can rest in knowing that nine times out of ten, I can sit down with an instrument, and I can achieve what I want. And usually that's just to start an idea, or just to sing for a minute. But it's something that I know I can do and I can do it well. And I have control over it. It's something I've curated and sort of shaped into what works for me. And so yeah that feeling of sort of rootedness in my music, I

think does help a little bit with the more insecurities and fears on the other side of just trying to figure out myself outside of my music.

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