

Spotlights

An opportunity to learn a little more about the folks you work with every day, their families, their side hustles, strange talents, passion projects, etc.



"I found a calling in this" **An Interview With Sarah Landeen** *by Sara Stansworth*

Sarah Landeen tells me that her newly finished novel is actually her eighth. "This is the first book that I've tried to get published, but I have a closet full of books that I've written." She admits that the first seven, mostly YA fantasy, will probably stay in her closet unless they go through some major editing. Even then, she says, "I might just move forward instead of looking back."

Sarah just took a big step forward in her writing career. Because of her new book, a historical fiction novel, she has officially signed with a literary agent! During our conversation, Sarah told me about how she felt called to go in this different direction and how a desire for justice for one of history's forgotten women helped her persist through 2 ½ years of research, writing, and re-writing.

How did it feel to have that hard work finally pay off? It was "incredibly validating," she said.

Tell me about your book. It's about the woman to bring the first printing press to America, right?

That's right. Her name was Elizabeth Glover, and in 1638 she and her husband bought a printing press. They got on a boat to Boston in the American Colonies, and halfway across the ocean, her husband died. So, she gets over here all alone with a printing press and thinks, "Well, I guess I'm just going to do this by myself then."

When we learned about this in my graphic design classes, her name was never mentioned. It was always about her husband who died on the boat ride over, or her servant who was illiterate and didn't even know how to run a printing press. But because they were the men, they got the credit.

So, when I discovered that there was this woman that was a major part of this, I thought, "Well, that's just not right. She deserves to get some credit." There is really a cool story that just hasn't ever been put together and told in one place. So, I wrote a book about it.

You said you first heard about her in her in a graphic design class you were taking.

The textbook for that class actually mentioned her by the wrong name! Her name is Elizabeth, and the book called her Anne Glover. It took me a while to even find out who this woman was, because I didn't even know her name. But I figured it out, I think, out of pure spite.

Did you find any primary sources from Elizabeth? Did you find anything with her actual voice?

I did not find any primary sources. But her house is still standing in Boston, and I did get to go there. There's a monument out front that is historically completely inaccurate. It said that she was married to her servant, which was not true.

I was so outraged that I went to the local Historical Society and I knocked on their door and told them their sign was wrong. They were actually very excited to hear that and thought it was really neat that I had records and resources and that I could cite all of these facts, saying, "No, this is the real story!"

You're not just writing a novel--you're helping rewrite the actual history!

I'm trying! I really want there to be an accurate representation of who this woman is. I feel like the whole time I've been working on her story, she's kind of been reading over my shoulder. I've been haunted by her ghost, and she'll be like, "Okay, you gotta go look up this fact." There was a feeling that I was being led in a lot of this. Like Elizabeth wanted me to get this done.

Who are your favorite authors, or who were your influences?

First would be Brandon Sanderson, which I know is weird since he is a fantasy writer. But I took his classes at BYU. I love his writing and I think he was a great

teacher. He definitely has an influence on my writing. I love Patrick Rothfuss's writing style. I think he's just a beautiful writer.

And it's cliché to say, but the one that inspired me to become a writer in the first place was JK Rowling. I couldn't stop reading Harry Potter and I just thought, "Boy, if I could if I could just read Harry Potter for the rest of my life. I'd be happy." And then I thought, wait a second, what if I could write for the rest of my life? That would make me even happier.

I think it's interesting that you mention Sanderson, because he's really known for his detailed world building. Do you think that writing historical fiction is also a form of world-building?

Yeah, for sure. I was able to dive into a lot of historical documents and see like, "Oh, this was Elizabeth Glover's house. And up the road was Stephen Day, and over here was Harvard." But world building is more than just a map. It's creating the culture and the feelings. Even though I was writing in a historical place that was a real place, I didn't live there, so there was a lot of world building that still had to happen.

How did you find time to write the book?

It took me about a year and half to write the whole thing and edit it, then research was at least another year. So, 2 ½ years.

I write for AllenComm part-time and that was honestly one of the reasons why I took the job. I texted my parents, saying, "Hey, I'm going to move to a part-time

job so I can try and be a writer!" I think I gave them a heart attack.

It was definitely a risk, but it was a risk that I was able to take in my situation—I am single. I have no kids. I rent a cheap basement bedroom. If I had any additional responsibility, I probably couldn't have done it. But being part-time here gave me time to write my novel. I have AllenComm really to thank for being able to accomplish this goal.

Tell me about the process of getting an agent.

So, I finished writing the book. And then I finished editing the book several times. The point finally came when I had to stop editing the book. So, I had a list of agents that all represented historical fiction. I sent my query letter out to 18 agents. I'd hear back from the rejections, and I would eat a lot of ice cream. Then I heard back from the one who asked for more pages. She came back and asked for the full manuscript and asked for 30-day exclusive rights. It only took her about two weeks to get back to me and say, "I love this. I want to represent this. Let's talk." That was a good day.

Do you feel like Elizabeth's ghost is satisfied now?

Oh yeah, she's been reading over my shoulder, and she seems happy. The thing is, now I'm finding other stories similar to Elizabeth's of women who have contributed to history but haven't received credit for it. We'll have to see whose story I take on next.

<https://sarahlandeen.com/> Read the first chapter of "Ink on Her Hands"