

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Episode 150:

Less Perfection, More Authenticity with Sara-Jean Gilbert

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J: You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 150. We're talking all about letting go of perfectionism, ending that performance for other people and coming back to your authentic-self; stay tuned.

J: Hey there, welcome back to Vibrant Happy Women, I'm Dr. Jen Riday, your host, your friend, your cheerleader, and I am so glad you're here. Last week, I spoke with Sarah Jenks all about really tapping into the magic of being authentic, feeling into what feels right for you. And we're continuing that theme this week with my guest, Sara-Jean Gilbert, who had to let go of this need to perform in an attempt to receive love and approval from her mom and her dad and from other people, and then eventually in her 30s, in late 30s towards 40, and eventually discovering that the only way to finding deep joy is through your heart, through knowing yourself and being authentic, and we're going to talk about that in this interview.

But first, I would love to give a shout out to our review of the week which comes from Gnarly Tree. Gnarly Tree wrote, "Love your podcast, Dr. Jen, my word for 2019 is 'cleanse'. I'm going to cleanse my body, my home, my relationships, my mind, my air, and my actions this year." I love that, sounds like she's being true to herself and putting herself first. Cleanse, cleansing all the yuck, cleansing all the gunk, getting off that stage, dropping the mic and just going in and living in that juicy authentic place. Thank you so much for that review, Gnarly Tree, I love your username, I love your words and I appreciate them. Everyone else listening, Vibrant Happy Women is a show very much for you as much as I get out of it things for myself and I love it. I do this for you and I would love for you to do me one small favor, if you're listening right now, set an intention to pause your recording or as soon as you stop your car or washing your dishes or folding your laundry, whatever else you're doing, stop and head to jenriday.com/iTunes and leave your review of the show. I read every single one and they make me feel connected to you, and maybe I'll read yours on the air one day. So, again, go to jenriday.com/iTunes and leave your review.

Well, without further ado, we need to dive into this fantastic interview, this fantastic conversation with Sara-Jean Gilbert, my friend. I met her in Sedona, Arizona, I mean, that's a magical place. If you haven't been there, you should be there some time. I was there dropping off my second son for rehab and drove north to Sedona to recover from the trauma of getting him there and the trauma he had been through, and I knew that Sara-Jean was in the area. I had met her through my Heal Your Heart program and we met for a meal, and instant connection. You know when you meet people who are just truly juicy and authentic and you love being around them? That's Sara-Jean. But as you'll hear in this interview

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today, it wasn't always that way because Sara-Jean grew up with this tendency to people please, to try to please others, to perform in a way that would get her the love and approval she craved. And you're going to learn how she turned that around and started giving that love and approval to herself, and it began when she determined she wasn't going to perform anymore for other people but to instead do what felt right for her. You're going to learn exactly how she did it and it's beautiful and Sara-Jean is a new woman. And I think that's the point of Vibrant Happy Women to help, you know, you can change, you could change your experience, you don't have to live in misery when you're at the Sara-Jean is going to help you do just that. So without further ado, let's dive into this fantastic conversation.

Welcome, everybody, I am talking with my friend, Sara-Jean Gilbert, and she is a dedicated full-time working mom and wife and recent transplant from the Southwest now living in Jacksonville, Illinois, and she works in college admission trying to make the dreams of high school seniors come true through her passion for access to higher education for everyone. In her free time, she likes to attend live concerts with her husband and having mommy-daughter dates with her daughter, Eliza Jane. Welcome to Vibrant Happy Women, Sara-Jean.

S: Thank you, Jen, I'm so excited to be on the show.

J: So before we dive into your quote, Sara-Jean, we have to just say, I knew you through Heal Your Heart, but then when I took...

S: Yes.

J: ... one of my sons to Anasazi, I think was my first son, the 15 year old, took him to Anasazi, I got to actually connect with you when you were living in the southwest. I went to...

S: I know.

J: ... Sedona and you were living in Flagstaff and we met and ate, and it was so cool. And now, here we are again.

S: Yeah.

J: And now, you live closer to me.

S: I loved it.

J: Yeah.

S: I know. I loved it. It was such a random time and I just had that evening open and it just really kind of worked out, I was so surprised and we had so much fun.

J: I know. And it was weird for me that we've never met in person, but then we just ate...



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S: Right.

J: ... like we were really good friends, I thought that was fascinating so...

S: I know, super fun.

J: Yeah, it was cool. And now, here you live in the Midwest by me so we have to do it again.

S: I know, I think that is in the cards, for sure.

J: (Laughs) Well, let's dive into a quote and then hear your story, I think it's a cool story.

S: Okay, yeah, great. So my quote is a Brené Brown quote and it's about authenticity. It reads, "Authenticity is not something we have or don't have, it's a practice, a conscious choice of how we want to live. Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It's about the choice to show up and be real, the choice to be honest, the choice to let ourselves be seen."

J: Mm, okay.

S: So I love that one.

J: Yeah, tell us where it started for you.

S: Yeah. Well, it leads into my motto, my daily motto, which is, "Less perfection, period. More authenticity, period." And I think it just has a lot to do with... I don't know, I kind of have a... kind of a two sides to my life. I am a Gemini and so there have always been, there's these two sides to my life that I have kind of battle with and it leads a lot into the things that I've been going through in the past year and kind of how I've kind of come through all of that, so I wanted to share that as part of my story. But growing up and all the way into my adult years actually, there's always been those two sides of my life. One that's been kind of dominated by perfectionism and performing, and I kind of call that my like pretty perfect person or personality, and then the other one is dominated by this truly happy person who wants to get out so bad, who has hopes, big dreams, and wants to live this big huge life. And those 2 things have just been totally in contrast and kind of battling throughout my whole life. I'm a recovering perfectionist, so on that pretty imperfect side, I've got all of those negative behaviors that have come together in my life that really did not serve me well at all. The majority was the performing so I would... I got really good at coming into a room or coming into any situation and reading the room and realizing exactly what I thought other people needed from me in that moment so I could perform that for them. And, you know, it worked there, I found at a really young age that that was a good way to get attention, a good way for people to understand me, I got people to notice me, it was kind of this thing. So when you're a little kid and things work, you do them over and over and over again.

J: Yeah.

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S: So that became a pretty big habit of mine.

J: Well, what's your first memory of doing that when you... do you have a memory of like...? That's crazy! What age do you...

S: Yeah.

J: ... you read the room and then performed in the way you thought would get people to...

S: Right.

J: ... to be pleased with you?

S: I know, it's funny because I always kind of go back to when my sister was born. I have one younger sister, she's my only sibling and she is almost 6 years younger than me. So at the time, I was about 5 and a half when she was born and like my world completely crashed around me, like everything I knew to be true was completely different. And she and I are great now, but back then, it was really hard because I had... you know, I was the only one and I had the full attention of everyone in my family, not just my parents. And I remember being, at the time when Rachel was like she was super little and she was adorable, she was this beautiful, beautiful baby, and everybody paid attention to her and I really had to try hard to kind of find my place. And I think that's where it all started. I think I... I remember watching them watch her and, you know, just talking about how gorgeous she was, she was a really beautiful baby, and it was this whole thing and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I need to do something or else I'm never going to have a place in this family." And I literally was like, "I need to hustle for some love here," like it was... it just felt like that. And so that's kind of where it all started from, really.

J: So, yeah, you're hustling for love and then...

S: Yeah.

J: Ooh, so much pressure because then, yeah, that's where that perfectionism came from; I love that.

S: Mm-hmm, yeah, absolutely.

J: Yeah.

S: And, you know, the idea that love is conditional, right, that you don't get anything for free, right, there's always something you have to be doing...

J: Aww, you have to perform.

S: ... in order to get that.

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J: Yeah.

S: Yeah.

J: Like a stage.

S: I did, at least that's what I thought, yeah...

J: Yeah, you were like the...

S: ... definitely like that.

J: ... actor on the stage of your life, therefore it's really cool you chose that quote, "Less perfection. More authenticity," yeah, that's cool.

S: Yeah, it all connects for sure, for sure. And at the same time, I had big dreams for my life, you know, I wanted to do something great with my life. I wanted to, you know... times and I was younger, I wanted to be famous or I want to be like star athlete or I wanted to do all these things. And I remember my mom always being like, "I'm not sure where all of this comes from you have really big dreams," and I was like, "Well, yeah, of course I do because... you know, because it was just completely always performing and that sort of thing." So I wanted this really big life but I kept holding myself back because I never really developed this like my own personality, like I always had the personality that I thought somebody else wanted me to have. And so it kind of followed me, it absolutely followed me all the way through to, you know, up until last year till like, you know, 40 now. So I've been constantly battling that for a really, really long time. I think luckily, I've had these times in my life like when I was in college or a couple of times when I was in high school, couple times after that where I really connected with someone and that, A, was able to kind of bring out my real me and bring that dreamer out more than that pretty perfect one. And so that how I've been able to connect with people on a real level and it's been... it's really intoxicating to have that, but it's so easy to go back to those old bad habits. And so I definitely think that throughout college where I met all of my great amazing girlfriends that are still really close to me today and when I met my husband and when, you know, I finally was able to reconnect with my sister as adults, you know, and we were able to like do these things together and have a relationship. Those times are really great for me because that was when there was little glimmers of the real me and so I could actually open up to people and it felt really, really good, but it also felt really, really scary. And so I've just gone back and forth throughout my life trying to figure out, you know, "Who am I? What's my relationship to other people? And how do I kind of get off of this treadmill where I'm just constantly having to, you know, perform for people?" Because it's exhausting and really hard when the result is not what you think it's going to be also. (Laughs)

J: Yeah, for sure. And so, you know, you have these times of connection and you're starting to get to know the real you, so how would you present that?

S: Mm-hmm.

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J: You said... you mentioned, now that you're 40, things are shifting, who is the real Sara-Jean?

S: Yeah, it still is hard because it's kind of a work in progress, right? But I think the main thing that I want to focus on in my world is that I am a person who is great at being a person for others but can also really embrace the person that I am, right? So I want to make sure that there's a place for me, I want to make sure that I'm being true to all of that. So here are some things that I love, I mean, honestly, I love my friends and my family, they've been amazing for me. I love reading. I am a little bit more of an introvert than I thought I was, which is a little bit weird. So I have to have time to myself in order to recharge and realize that, you know, the real me needs something a little bit more than just conversation and hanging out, the real me needs a little more of that quiet time...

J: Mm-hmm.

S: ... which is great, you know, I love connecting with folks, you know? One of my favorite things to do is text my sister because she has 3 kids, 2 boys and a girl, and they all ride in the car sometimes together. And when her text messages comes through from me, it's all emojis and it reads out the emojis and she thinks it's hilarious and her kids just laugh hysterically. So we have this little text being back and forth where we text emojis and it's really cute.

J: Okay, wait, I have to interrupt you.

S: (Laughs), It's funny.

J: Well, how do, you know, geez like that to talk? I didn't even know that existed. What is this? I mean it.

S: It's through her car so she... it pairs with her vehicle and then it reads out anything, so words, text messages or any... or like she can answer the phone right then.

J: Really? Oh, cool.

S: It reads out emojis. So my daughter's really...

J: Santa Claus emoji.

S: She loves...

J: Pine tree emoji.

S: Exactly, yeah.

J: Oh, that's hilarious.

S: Yeah.

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[Laughter]

S: And so the boys love it, they think it's hilarious. My daughter loves typing it out because she's like, "Oh, look, I put this one in," and so they're really cute.

J: Yeah. Oh, that's fun, that's fun.

S: Anytime I can connect really and fully with people that I know really cherish me and really love being able to connect and reconnect with me, that's what really gives me a lot of joy. And, I mean, honestly, I love my work. I... you know, I have a normal job, which is funny, it's like a 9-to-5, but I get a chance to really, really help people and help high school kids realize their dreams by going to college and doing something completely different than they thought they would have and really finding out who they are. So in a way, I'm kind of helping others do what I didn't... well, have that good at-college experience that I had and then also experience that for themselves.

J: That's cool.

S: So I've got a lot going on, I got a lot going on.

J: Yeah, and you... you mentioned the word 'connect' a lot so I can tell, even though...

S: Yes.

J: ... you mentioned being an introvert, you're a people person, you love helping.

S: Yeah.

J: Yeah. What...

S: Well... yeah.

J: Yeah, what are we going to say?

S: I am more of an introvert than I thought I was but I am an extrovert, so just to throw that in there.

J: Ah, gotcha, gotcha.

S: There's more I in there than I thought, yeah, uh-huh.

J: Ah, so you need some of both, yeah, ambivert. (Laughs)

S: I do, yes, a little bit more than I thought.

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J: So what are some unique things about you? I know one that I hope you'll mention about your love of bands, I think that's so fascinating.

S: Oh, yeah, yeah. So when I first met my husband, he was working security for the Colorado Rockies and I worked at the baseball park, it was like this weird in between job that I did. And so he was also working for the same security company at a couple of different venues in Denver. And so like 5 of our first dates or something like that were literally going to shows for free, and so he would be like, "Hey, what concerts do you want to go to? Because I can go for free." And so we started off our relationship like really enjoying that time where you can just have a live music experience, enjoy the music, but then also really through a very strange way, connect with everyone in the room because you're having that same collective experience.

J: Yeah.

S: And hopefully it's a great one, right, hopefully you're really enjoying everything and everyone it's like the crowds awesome and everybody's having a great time. But I love that, I love that music can have that sort of transformational type experience, and I know a lot of people who have had those where you go to a show and you're like changed. (Laughs)

J: Yeah!

S: It's really fun.

J: Well, that's funny you mentioned that. The only concert I've ever been to that's like a music concert was, I don't know if you remember these twin brothers with long blonde hair back in the 90s, but Nelson. (Laughs)

S: Oh yeah!

J: We went to that...

S: Oh my gosh, that's so funny.

J: ... and I was like, I don't know, maybe I was too analytical, but I didn't get... the experience never hit me.

S: Yeah.

J: But then as an adult, I've been in arenas for like self-help events, especially Tony Robbins, I get...

S: Oh yeah.

J: ... the vibe. The fact that you're there together, you feel bonded in your life with strangers, it's so crazy!

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S: Yeah! And you have people from different backgrounds...

J: Yeah!

S: ... who enjoy the same things, which is really cool, yeah.

J: Yeah.

S: So my favorite bands, I mean, is definitely a collective favorite with my husband and I. So we like jam bands, so they are our favorite at this point in time is, they're called The String Cheese Incident, which is a great name.

J: Mm!

S: I know. But look them up, they are fantastic. They're this great band, they have a mix between kind of electronic keyboards type thing and then bluegrass jam, and it's really cool.

J: No, that's so cool!

S: It's a really cool mix.

J: I will.

S: It's so unique. So... and one of the favorite places to go see bands is Red Rocks in Colorado in Denver and it's amazing, we've been there a lot. And that's just one of those times where, I mean, you're in nature, this place is like literally built by nature, it's all rock it's gorgeous. And having that experience with that particular band at Red Rocks, it's like they're coming home and it's just great, it's just really great, we love it, so yeah.

J: Do you think you'll get back out that way since it's a little further than it used to be probably?

S: You know, yeah, I think so. I think it's... it's weird, it's not that much further than from Flagstaff.

J: Really?

S: So it's like it was 12 hours from Flagstaff, just head north and now it's 12 hours from where we are here just head west, so yeah, we'll get back there. My husband has family there too so we will definitely get back there, which is exciting.

J: That's so cool.

S: New...

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J: That's so cool.

S: Yeah.

J: Well, what else makes you unique, you know?

S: Oh gosh, I'm one of those people who I smile really readily, it's just one of those things, and I have been told that, you know, I come in the room, and if I'm smiling genuinely I'm really enjoying myself, it kind of like lights everything up. So I, at the risk of tooting my own horn, that is one thing, because I can kind of put people at ease which is really nice and it helps when you're the only one you know in the room and you're trying to, you know, spark up a conversation with somebody randomly or whatever, so it's a good little thing. So there's that, for sure.

J: That's a huge talent.

S: Yeah.

J: When we had dinner that time.

S: Yeah.

J: Yeah, that's true about you; I love that.

S: (Laughs)

J: It is true.

S: Yeah, and I really like meeting new people and having that extrovert part of me. And one of the things that's great about my job is I get to meet new people all the time. I get to meet students and their families and really help to put them at ease and help them make some big decisions. Because choosing a college is a really big decision, and one thing that I really like is that I want to be really real with these people and I really want to make sure that they have all the information that they need. And so being able to have that, I've been told I have that comforting type feeling too. So...

J: Nice.

S: ... that I can be welcoming and people feel at ease when they're with me and when they're talking with me.

J: Yeah.

S: So those are some things, for sure. And I... you know, I like to be a little crafty but I'm kind of in-between what I love crafty-wise.

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J: Oh yeah.

S: I like to cut out shapes of magazine pictures and things that are pretty and collect colors like that.

J: Mm-hmm.

S: (Laughs) It's kind of weird but those kinds of things. I've done mosaic stuff out of that before.

J: Ooh.

S: It's been really a fun project. So I don't know...

J: That's so cool.

S: ... I'm just kind of in-between that so...

J: Well, back to our topic of perfectionism, I know... let's imagine all...

S: Yeah.

J: ... of those women. I mean, you've interacted with a lot of people so you said you could read the room. So there's all these women out there that probably still battle with perfectionism, and tell us more about that story, you know, how has that affected your mood and your parenting and your marriage and... and everything as you've tried to shake that off and be more authentic? You know, what does that look like for you or has it looked like and how is it different now?

S: Yeah, I think the main thing that sticks out for me is the hustle and the making sure that everything is perfect. And I think that I did that a lot especially in the early years of my marriage and trying to like be the perfect whatever, fill in the blank, perfect wife, perfect friend, perfect mother, all of those things. And I really, really wanted that because I was, in the end, very fearful that, you know, any relationship that I had would go away, that at some point they would figure out the real me and they wouldn't like that and then that would be the end of really everything. It just felt like there was a lot at stake in the perfectionism and in the performing and on all of that stuff and I just... I just got so tired of it and it started really affecting my world, it started affecting my mental health, I had a lot of depression and anxiety issues around having huge expectations and obviously not being able to hit those big expectations because, I mean, it was an absolutely unattainable ideal. And so I think a lot of that had a big impact on my life and a big impact on all my relationships. And I am so incredibly lucky that my husband was able to stick with me and really understand that, you know, like, "You need some help with this stuff. I don't know what I can do to help but I'm here for you. Let's figure out how to do something different because we really need to do something different." And because he couldn't... I mean, that's a really unfair burden for him to have to convince me constantly that, you know, he's not going anywhere, that he's in it for the long haul, that he does truly and really love me, all of those things, that's a big burden. And so I did end up seeking some therapy. What was hard about that was it was good to talk with someone, but

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I never had any sort of actionable steps for how to do something different. When it was my husband, he would say, "Oh, you just need to have more confidence," and I was like, "Okay, great, let me snap my fingers and make that happen."

J: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah.

S: And it just got to be like a broken record, "You just have to have more confidence," I was like, "Okay, so someone needs to show me how that looks because obviously I don't know how that looks." And I didn't just want it to be like, "Oh, look, the appearance of myself having so much more confidence," like I wanted it to be real obviously because I didn't want to just, you know, perform the, "Look at me, I have confidence," sort of dance.

J: Yeah.

S: And so I really wanted to get into something more. And then last year when I was able to... I had been listening to your podcast for about, you know, 6 months ahead of that and I got the stuff about the Heal Your Heart, and it was at the exact right time, right? It was about a week after we had had our latest big fight about, "I need to have... something needs to change," and, "What can I do?" and, "Let me know how I can help you. What's going on? Something needs to give." And so I thought, "Okay, fine, you know, I'm just going to do this and see if this helps, and then maybe I'll do something else. But for now, this is what I'm going to do." And, I mean, I have to say (and you and I have talked about this), it was just the catalyst for really making some huge big changes in my life. Not to say that everything is perfect, not to say that I don't, you know, kind of relapse back into old ways, but I know how to stop myself now, which is just incredible, and I know how to identify it and then move on from there without being ashamed or without being defensive or anything like that. Some of my... those were my old go-to moves. And I think now, it's just really different. It's just really different and that's, I mean, the main thing is that because I had... I actually had some actionable steps and things that I could do to kind of build up that where I could heal my heart and really truly figure out what it is that I'm supposed to be doing here and then how can I be better at being myself, really.

J: So let's spill the beans. What were your most important actionable steps?

S: (Laughs)

J: I don't want to talking, it's no big secret.

S: Yeah.

J: You know, what helped you? Because someone listening might just need what you have to offer or share.

S: Right, right. I think the main thing for me... well, there's a few things. One of them is paying attention to my life, so like really looking at what my life is like, right? Because in the end when all, everything is

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said and done, my life was really amazing. I had amazing family and friends that loved me, I had husband who loves me (still do), I had a daughter, a really great job, I had home, like there's lots of good. I was not paying attention to the good that was just there, right? I was not paying attention to all of the great things that we're going on in my life and I was instead paying attention to, you know, the negative voices and negative self-talk that was just going around and around in my head. So I really had to pay attention to what was good and what really was there. The next thing I had to do was really take a good look at me and decide what I wanted to keep about me and what I wanted to... I don't know, what I could kind of leave behind; not forever, but just kind of push to the back. So I wanted to be more authentic, that was my word for the year and I was just going to go for it, but how do I make that happen? I pay attention, I do what I need to do, kind of do the work, but then also, I just had to pay attention to the things that I really liked about myself and not the things that I didn't, and how do I get out of that kind of that get off the treadmill of doing all of the same things over and over again that weren't helping me out at all? Those 2 things were the main things, and then just listening to myself. You know, everybody has their own way of doing this or they call it different things or they call it, you know, mindfulness or whatever, but for me, it was a combination of meditation, actually literally talking to myself, and just noticing and being grateful for the things that are... that are in my life that I really love. And it doesn't have to be big stuff but it was just some little things here and there. And if in that daily practice of the authenticity and the great gratitude and paying attention, all of that really did help me to kind of snap myself out of whatever that was that was going on with me and really help me to pay attention to what my life really was, not necessarily what I thought it should be.

J: Hmm.

S: And that was a big part, the big catalyst for making some major changes in my life.

J: So why do you think that didn't happen in therapy, you know?

S: Yeah.

J: I don't know the answer to this question and that's why I asked you. You know, I think...

S: Yeah.

J: ... Heal Your Heart brings women together and I think there's something about all of us doing it together that is different than therapy, I'm not sure, what do you think?

S: Yeah, I think it's the connection. I mean, I love... I really enjoyed... I really enjoyed going to therapy and investing in myself time, being able to talk about myself and being able to work through some of the stuff that had happened in the past, and it was really helpful for me. But at a certain point, I reached like that critical mass where it was like, "I need to get out of my own head, and me being here isn't really doing that for me." What helped me (and you mentioned, you know, doing it together) was literally every week getting together with this group and vowing to myself that I wasn't going to put on a show.

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J: Hmm.

S: I wasn't going to be, you know, perfect little Sara-Jean and like that wasn't going to be it. I was going to be whoever this person is. I was going to show up, I was going to cry, I was going to laugh, I was going to give advice, I was going to just listen, I was going to do all the things that I needed to do. And for some reason, the working with the women that were in that group, we were all super different, we were all just experiencing very different things, but somehow it just worked so that we were able to be there for each other and be supportive, but then also really learn from each other, which is just... I mean, it's kind of... it's kind of invaluable because there was just so much going on every week. And I was there all the time, like I made a commitment to myself to be present and actually to show up physically, and all of that stuff was really, really important for me. And I think just the combination of all of those things where it was definitely time, I needed to be more authentic, here I am physically showing up and here I am doing the work and helping other people, those things just fit for me, absolutely.

J: Well, let's fast-forward to today.

S: Mm-hmm.

J: I just had a conversation with you maybe a week or 2 ago and that's when we...

S: Yeah.

J: ... decided that, "Oh, we need to do this; this interview."

S: Yeah. (Laughs)

J: But, yeah, I feel like you're a completely different person. You exude deep confidence. You mentioned confidence, but you exude, not only confidence, but deep peace with who you are and happiness just like a person you'd want to be around because you're so settled and calm in yourself. You know, that... that calm feeling you have around certain people...

S: Yeah.

J: ... that's how I feel...

S: Mm-hmm, yeah.

J: ... when I talk to you now; it's so cool.

S: That's great.

J: Yeah.

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S: I love that. I mean, that... in the end, that was like the goal all along, right, I wanted to be a person that people wanted to be around, I just went about it a completely wrong way.

J: Yeah.

S: Just completely.

J: Yeah.

S: Yeah. (Laughs)

J: My favorite word right now is 'juicy', you're just juicy, Sarah. And I don't know what that means...

S: (Laughs)

J: ... but you're not brittle, you're not brittle. Think of the opposite like...

S: No.

J:... you were brittle, you were delicate, now you're just juicy.

S: Yeah.

J: You know? Yeah, I love it.

S: Yeah, yeah.

J: Well, obviously Heal Your Heart's not open right now, it only opens once a year but...

S: Right.

J: ... for those listening, what advice would you have for them to just start their own journey of healing their hearts and getting rid of that perfectionism and being more authentic? I guess kind of maybe not quite yet your challenge but maybe your first steps or something.

S: Yeah, that's a really good question because that was the problem that I had was being a self-starter actually, so this is maybe a little bit more challenging. But I think... I think what really is good is surrounding yourself with things that really matter to you. And I think what ended up starting me on this journey in general was finding the podcast, finding things that I loved that I could spend time doing and really investing in myself. And I don't mean like money-wise, I don't mean monetary and I don't necessarily mean like the self-care where you like pedicure yourself to, you know, feeling better.

J: (Laughs)

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S: But in the end, like I...

[Laughter]

S: I think people really need to have some sort of a connection with something that makes them feel great. And so whatever that is, as long as it's a healthy thing and as long as the goal is to help you to feel better, help you to feel more vibrant, help you to kind of pick yourself out of the funk that you might be in...

J: Yeah.

S: ... it's a really good head start. And then again, don't ever stop, right? You don't want to like go back and say, "Oh, I'm fine, everything's fine now," because it's not, you really just want to keep going. Because like my quote in beginning, it's the daily practice, it's not just a, "One and done, now I'm finished," sort of thing, there's... it's a constant where you never quite make it to the finish line, but that's okay because there's all sorts of really, really amazing things along the way that I never would have seen or noticed or even experienced if I hadn't started down on this journey. And, I mean, like I said before, none of this is perfect, like none of this is perfect and that is great because I've been able to change a lot of things about myself and I know it's not perfect and that's totally fine with me. And I've even started taking that word out of my own vocabulary because I really want to make sure that I'm not sliding back into the idea that perfect is something that I should be working for it because it's not, you know? My relationship with my husband, it's not perfect but it's us, it is ours and it is great and it's... you know, it is just exactly what we need. And, you know, my relationship with my daughter it's not perfect but it's amazing because we have so much going on all the time and she's pushing the limits and, man, she's not the same little girl as I was and I love it, every minute of it.

J: (Laughs) That's so cool.

S: And I'm so excited that she is just exerting all of the things that a little girl is supposed to do, like she is just really going for her life and I love that and it is exactly the opposite of how things were with me, so hooray! And with my friends, you know, it's not perfect but they know me and they love me and there will always show up for me, and I love that; I just love that. And my family, you know, there's some things that are crazy about my family, but we love each other and support each other and that is exactly what we need out of that relationship. So none of it's perfect, but it is just exactly what I need and that's... yeah, I couldn't ask for anything more.

J: One of the things I notice is different about you as I hear you talk in your languages, before, you mentioned your sister, there was this sense of comparison, looking outside of yourself...

S: Oh yeah, mm-hmm.

J: ... to figure out what you should do. What is it that enables you to stop looking? Because you're not comparing anymore because you say, "It's us, this is our marriage, and she's my daughter and this is..."

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you're so completely content with your situation and I can hear you're not comparing anymore. Like, how did you get to that place?

S: Yeah.

J: Like, that's hard to get there. (Laughs)

S: Oh, it is. And it's hard to unlearn because, as women, we... I feel like we pick that up very, very early on; I know that I did obviously. So I learned to put it down when I started really appreciating women for who they are and appreciating everything for what it is, not necessarily what it could be. So it's just a very different situation so it's not... you know, you mentioned my sister, so that was my first area of comparison was, you know, "I'm not her, oh no, that means, you know, something is wrong with me." Well, no, it's, "I'm not her she's like... she's so great, like she does all these things, she has 3 kids, I do not know how she does it. She's got a great husband and a great life, all of that, I'm so happy for her and I celebrate all of that," and I try and bring that into everything what I see. So, you know, I'll see a woman who's like really beautiful and my first reaction before would have been like, "Oh my god, you know, like I will never be that kind of beautiful," I've said that to myself, I don't even know how many times. But now, I look at it like, "Oh my god, she is so beautiful! Like, wow!" you know, like as an appreciation, not as in like, "Oh no, you know, that means something's wrong with me." And it just changes everything, it just totally flips it. And so, I mean, that's one thing I've challenged myself to do. And occasionally I go back to it where I'm just like, "Ugh," but it doesn't stay for long.

J: Mm-hmm.

S: And I don't allow it to kind of spiral out of control because that would just be... there's... I don't have time for that, I'm too busy trying to do other things so on to the next thing, right? So...

J: Yeah. And you mentioned you catch yourself before you spiral down too far, and you and I were talking...

S: Uh-huh.

J: ... about this a couple weeks ago, but I think there comes a point when you hit a certain level of happiness that you cannot go back, it would be too painful to even contemplate. It's like you've shut the gate there and you can't spiral...

S: Right.

J: ... back as low as you did before, I don't know.

S: Yeah.

J: I'm waiting to see how this plays out in my own life, but I know...

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S: Mm-hmm.

J: ... the level of misery I had maybe 8 or 10 years ago was insane.

S: Yeah.

J: And I... I can't...

S: Yeah.

J: ...even imagine feeling that again, you know? And I might have had a really hard year...

S: I know.

J: ... had a really hard year, but I didn't hit that level of misery really. I had moments and I felt the pain of it and I moved on. But do you feel like it's working that way for you as well or am I inaccurate? (Laughs)

S: I do. I mean, no, no, I think that's really valid because I am... I do have moments where it feels similar to that and I feel like I could go a little bit... you know, a little bit into the spiral, but I don't want you. I think that there was... when I was kind of in the thick of it all, there was kind of this comfort in the spiral like, "Oh well, you know, things are crazy, I'm allowed to get a little bit nuts," you know?

J: Mm-hmm.

S: And but it's like, "No, no," (Laughs) it was only because I never really gave myself space and I never really gave myself time to really understand what was going on. So if I was upset, I didn't give myself space to be upset, I just had to hold on to it until it was too much to bear and then the freak-out happened.

J: Ah, yes, that's it, that's exactly it.

S: Right.

J: Yeah.

S: And so now, it's a little bit more of, "No, I'm going to... you know, if I'm upset, I'm going to get upset, or if I'm angry about something or if I'm confused or frustrated or whatever, like that's going to happen. If I have to cry, I will cry, like I'm not going to like just hold it in and decide that, you know, that's not something I need to do right now. Because if I do, I do and it's totally fine." But, you know, I think it plays out a lot in my marriage where, I mean, for the longest time, I had really hard time figuring out how to have a fight with him because he's a huge questioner and so he's always going to question what I have say and it would just get under my skin so much because it was like, "You never trust what I have to say," or whatever and then we'd have this huge fight or whatever and it would just be this thing. But now, I can

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just talk with him and be like, "You know, you're doing that thing again where you're not... you're sounding like you're not trusting me," and then he can be like, "Oh, no, that's not what this is, it's something else. Here's what's really going on." And we can actually have a conversation instead of just, you know... instead of yelling or crying and being upset or...

J: Ooh, yeah!

S: ... going to the, "You always do this!" you know?

J: Yeah, yeah.

S: So it's more helpful.

J: Yeah, for sure.

[Laughter]

J: Well, what does your husband think of the changes and has he noticed? Can you verbalize it or is he just along for the ride kind of like, "Whoa, what happened to Sara-Jean," you know?

S: (Laughs) I think that he's one of those guys who is... he loves to talk and chat and kind of have the, you know, conversation and stuff, but he's not really big on the... the praise per se.

J: Mm-hmm.

S: So I chose somebody who doesn't praise, you know, like really readily. That's sometimes been pretty hard for me but I like that now because then it's not like I'm having to work for it, it's like I'm having to, "Okay, well why do I really want this from him? Do I know that this is happening? Okay." So I do notice that things are different, he does notice but doesn't really talk about it...

J: Mm.

S: ... which is fine with me because that is who he is and I'm... you know, I'm meeting him where he is and I'm not trying to make him something that he's not, and that is definitely something that I have learned this year. It was not that I was trying to change him or make him a better husband or person or whatever because he's great and super supportive and really understanding of what I need, but yeah, I know for a fact that that's not going to be something he's going to talk about like, "Oh, I've noticed this really amazing change in you..."

J: (Laughs)

S: "... and you're great."

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J: (Laughs)

S: But he thinks it and so I have to remember and remind myself that, "He does think I'm amazing, he always thought I was amazing; news flash!" And so that is really... I'm just kind of more tuned into that and I can be like, "Oh yeah, he does think that, okay," and because there's no reason why he shouldn't.

J: Yeah.

S: And there's no reason why...you know? And that's what he's wanted me to tune into for a very long time. (Laughs)

J: Ah, that's good.

S: And we're just finally kind of on that same page. Again, not ideal all the time, but we are definitely working on it, so yeah.

J: That's awesome. Well, let's talk about your morning routine. What helps you stay so juicy, Sara-Jean? (Laughs)

S: Yeah. (Laughs)

J: I love that word. I hope that no one misinterprets it.

S: I know that's funny.

J: That's good, yeah. (Laughs)

S: No, it's fine. So my morning routine needs some work, for sure. Currently, we are living with my in-laws, which is a challenge. It's a really large house and so we have the second floor of the house, but I get up in the morning and I'm the only one awake for about an hour, and so I kind of have to tiptoe between being too loud and, you know, figuring out how I'm trying to do the rest of my day. But I wake up my daughter and we get ready and then she has breakfast, I get dressed, my husband takes her to the bus and she goes to school and then I drive for 45 minutes to come to work. I think I'm doing the best I can with the current situation.

J: Yeah, yeah.

S: But once we move into our new place and we're actually settled, I'm going to have to have sort of a different morning routine because I like how it's going now, I just don't know how sustainable it is. (Laughs)

J: Right, right.

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S: Because we're so close to like, "Oh no, we're late!" and freaking out and whatever.

J: Right, right.

S: So I want to make things as not as rushed as possible, so that sometimes it's a challenge. But the morning routine is okay, I just don't... I don't really do a whole lot for me except for, you know, make sure that my normal everyday needs are met, which is great, but there needs to be a little bit more. So that's kind of my... a challenge for me for this year is to figure out what that's going to be.

J: Yeah. Well, so you mentioned one of your big changes is listening to yourself, where do you squeeze that in in a busy life? Because a lot of people would say the exact same thing about their morning routine, and are you finding time in the evening or during your lunch break or when you're driving? How do you fit it in?

S: Yeah. Ironically, during my drive... so I have a 45-minute drive each way into work, it is a great buffer so that I can get ready for my day, and then on the way home, come down for my day, right?

J: Mm-hmm.

S: I clear the slate and I come home and that is what I focus on, being at home. I come to work, I focus on being at work.

J: Mm-hmm.

S: And that's really important for me because I want to make sure that my balance is right with the work and the home life.

J: Yeah.

S: That's the most important thing for me; so I do that. I have some time during my lunch break where I can take some time walk around campus. We have a beautiful campus here and there's lots of trees, it's gorgeous. There's a lot of snow right now so it's not as enjoyable as it was in the summertime, but I do like to walk around and kind of do some things. I would love to... we have a great pool facility here on campus, I would love to get in to do some lap swims over the... over the lunch break. And eventually, I'll probably get into that, but at this point, I'm still trying to figure it out. Routine is a little different being in a whole different place, whole different job, and trying to figure all the things out. But...

J: Yeah, for sure. They say it takes a year after you move to settle into routines.

S: Absolutely.

J: Yep.

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S: Yeah, yeah. So, you know, I'm just trying so a few things here and there and take some time to really decompress. And I think on those drives is really where I'm kind of getting it the most. And sometimes I talk to my friends or my family, you know, just kind of do my own thing. I do like to go to sleep pretty early these days, which has been really, really nice. And so I do take some time before I go to bed I do some journaling. Right when I get into work, I journal some gratitude so that I can start my day off with that in mind before I get into you the absolute craziness of my workday, but that's been really helpful too. So there's a few little things I'm doing, still trying to figure it out.

J: Yeah. And I like how you're... you're just totally cool with it; you should be. You know, people think that I must have this perfect morning routine, mine is super flowy.

S: (Laughs)

J: No, really. Because we talk about it a lot on the show, but mine is super flowy.

S: Yeah, yeah.

J: Some days, I don't do a bit of it, and other days, I'll spend 3 hours, and sometimes, I spend 15 minutes.

S: Right.

J: I just gauge how I'm feeling and go with what works, you know, so...

S: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

J: Well, Sara-Jean, what does it mean for you to be a vibrant happy woman?

S: I have a lot of little phrases that I've strung together, so I'm kind of like putting it all together as we're... as we're talking about it. But I think that, for me, obviously it is to truly be me and to truly be authentic with myself, to live that big life that I always wanted to, I'm kind of honoring my little self, and living a big life, living with purpose. And I also really think it's important to show my imperfections to others so that they can get inspired by how I live with my imperfections. That's kind of my... yeah, I'm looking... I'm always looking for the next big challenge. I think that's one of them for me is that showing my imperfections, because there is no one perfect person and we're all doing the best we can and trying to figure it out as we go along, and that... I would love to be that point of inspiration for people.

J: Yeah, to shine in your imperfection; that's humanity.

S: Yep.

J: That's the human condition; I love that.

S: Yeah, absolutely.

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J: Yeah.

S: Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah.

J: And a challenge from you to our listeners.

S: Yeah. I think my thing is going to be to pay attention. So pay attention to you, pay attention to those around you, pay attention to the world you live in, your immediate space, whatever that is, and take some time to really just get into that. And I think the way that I want people to do it mostly is to really, really listen to those people that like make up your life. So if that's a significant other or your kids, take some time to really listen to them, and that means that you are still and you're listening and you're connecting and all that stuff, because it's so important. Everybody wants to be heard, everybody wants to have that attention paid to them, and when you really listen, you're truly making that connection, and then that really kind of starts a whole new better way of being together. And I think that makes those connections that much more vibrant. So pay attention to each other because it's really important, and truly listening is a tool that doesn't get used very often, and I think it really does help us to connect...

J: Beautiful.

S: ... in a real way.

J: Beautiful.

S: Yeah.

J: Excellent advice. Well, thank you so much for being on the show, Sara-Jean. I love you, I love everything you shared, it's fantastic.

[Laughter]

S: It was so much fun, I have always wanted to be on the show so I'm really, really excited that...

J: Yay!

S: ... I got this opportunity, so thank you, Jen.

J: I didn't even know you wanted to be on; luckily I asked you.

[Laughter]

J: So fun.

S: Thank you!

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J: Yay!

[Laughter]

J: Thank you so much, Sara-Jean, this was awesome.

S: Yes, yeah, I had so much fun, thank you for thinking of me.

J: (Laughs)

S: So exciting!

J: Cool, take care.

There you have it. I hope that interview inspires you to get in touch with your true authentic self. What do you like? What have you given up as you've attempted to help other people and what would you like to do today or this week? What would feel juicy and amazing? And then do those things. That is the path happiness, listening to that inner voice and not just running on that treadmill forever and ever and ever until the day you die and then it's too late. Remember, the most important gift you can give your loved ones, the greatest gift you can give your loved ones is your own happiness, and that starts with being true to you, being authentic, no longer performing in an attempt to get others love and approval, but giving that gift of love and approval to yourself. And that requires going inward and listening to what you really love and what you really want.

Well, my friends, this has been amazing, Sara-Jean was amazing, right? And that concludes our 3 weeks of Sarah's; we had Sara Bates, and then Sarah Jenks and Sara-Jean Gilbert. And next week, I will be talking to Jane Ransom all about the brain chemistry of sex; crazy, it's amazing. So many nuggets of wisdom, that's a must listen because we all could use more information in that department, am I right? Especially when it comes to the brain and what's happening, the differences between men and women in that regard, and I found it fascinating. One last thing, do you have a friend who could use some help with finding her authentic self, letting go of this need to please others? Then share this podcast with her through social media or through an email, it's simple, just share this link, jenriday.com/150; jenriday.com/150. You can drop it in any form of social and say, "Hey, check this out this, will really help your life." And I appreciate it, I'm always looking to touch other women because I don't want anyone to suffer in misery the way I did all those years ago or the way Sara-Jean did last year. The goal is to help spread this Vibrant Happy Women movement. Thank you so much for listening today and I will see you again next week, talking with Jane Ransom about the brain and sex; 2 fascinating topics, but they go together. I will see you again soon, and until then, make it a juicy, vibrant, happy, authentic week. Take care.

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