

QQQ Sarah Kapit

[00:00:00] **Sarah K:** you kind of can't just keep fixating on the past or expecting things will always be good and just enjoy them while they are good because they, there are gonna be those highs and lows.

[00:00:15] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries, Qualms and Quirks, the weekly podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from first spark to day of publication. I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas, and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk.

[00:00:29] Sarah Kapit is the author of several books for young readers. Her novel *Get a Grip*, Vivi Cohen earned the Schneider Family Honor, and Washington State Book Award.

[00:00:38] Sarah's most recent book, *second Chance Summer*, came out from Macmillan on May 23rd, 2023. So please welcome Sarah to the show. Hello.

[00:00:47] **Sarah K:** Hi. Good, good to be here.

[00:00:49] **Sarah:** I'm so glad you, DMed me so we could get you on the show. We're gonna talk about your journey to publication. We're gonna start kind of all the way back at the beginning. When did you first start getting interested in writing, And then how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:01:05] **Sarah K:** I wanted to be a novelist since I was really a little kid. I was one of those kids who just, I was good at writing and everybody said, you're going to be a writer, and I just really wanted it. But then as I got older, I just sort of started thinking that I wasn't creative enough or good enough to write fiction.

[00:01:23] And so I pursued another path. I went to graduate school. I got a PhD in history from ucla, which, I love history and that was actually a great experience. However, as um, some people might know, it is really, really hard to get a job with a PhD in history, especially in academia. And so I did not get a job, which I realize now is for the best, but.

[00:01:44] During that time when I was just frustrated with that and it just seemed like something that I put so many years into just wasn't working out. I decided to go back to my childhood dream of writing novel. And so I wrote,

um, my first novel was Ya and it wasn't very good, but I proved to myself that I could finish something and that was just so special to me.

[00:02:04] And that was probably around 20 15, 20 16. So then I, I wrote another book and that one was better. It still wasn't like all the way there, but I got into author Mentor Match with that, um, manuscript, and I had a wonderful mentor, Gail Villanueva, and she really encouraged me and she was like the first person outside of my family to kind of like suggest to me that I could actually.

[00:02:29] Do this. And I started querying that book a little. But around the same time I started writing another book that I felt was stronger and that book was my debut. Get A Grip Vivy Cohen. I think I entered it it into pitch wars in, 2017, and I was chosen. My mentor Mike Grosso, um, was really great. He helped me revise so I, I did pitch wars, but I was not one of those people who got an agent right after Pitch Wars.

[00:02:58] It took me, um, I think I got like eight requests or something. Something pretty low. I mean, Not, not great. And then, a few months later though, I did get a few offers of representation. I had three offers and I chose to go with one agent.

[00:03:13] **Sarah:** So once you started getting serious about publication, how did you learn more about the publishing industry?

[00:03:18] Like how it works, how did query all these different things?

[00:03:22] **Sarah K:** well, I looked at online resources like, query Shark and, a few other things, but really for me it was actually, it was mentors like Gail and Mike who really kind of just helped me to know that I was on the right track. And also, um, I. A critique partner, NORS. My, um, actually one of my longtime critique partners is Adriana Cuevas, author of the Total Eclipse of Nester Lopez and other wonderful books.

[00:03:46] And, um, actually when we first met each other, neither of us had an agent. We, we had, like, I think we met on Right on Con, which was actually another great resource we just sort of met and we liked each other's work and, and we sort of went through together and ended up, ended up debuting the same year.

[00:03:59] And so that was really cool.

[00:04:00] **Sarah:** Nice. A Adrianna has been on the podcast

[00:04:03] **Sarah K:** Oh, okay. Awesome.

[00:04:05] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:04:05] **Sarah K:** Okay. Another, like, we keep doing kind of the same things that we're around the same time, but no, not quite.

[00:04:10] **Sarah:** Yeah. So then what happened? You mentioned you got your first agent after Pitch Wars. Can you break down kind of for us, the experience from then to getting your first book contract? And then I know specifically for you, that wasn't really the end of your story either. So if you wanna tell us about what happened after that as well.

[00:04:27] **Sarah K:** Yeah. Well, I signed I think maybe early February of, I guess it was 2018 now. So I signed with an agent and, that was really awesome and she didn't actually ask for many revisions that she thought it was pretty good to go as it was. And I think a few months after we signed, we, um, sent it out in submission and within a month we'd sold the book at auction, which I realize is not.

[00:04:51] Typical, but it was certainly, it was a, a good experience. So we, I was, didn't have that long on sub and we sold it to Penguin, um, to my wonderful editor Dana.

[00:05:01] **Sarah:** And then after you sold that first book, you sold a second book with that same agent, right?

[00:05:06] **Sarah K:** Yes. And actually in between she had changed agencies because her, because of issues at her first agency. And so I had, two different agencies for my first two books, but she sold the second book, um, same editor and publisher. Um, that book is the Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family, which came 2021, I believe.

[00:05:27] **Sarah:** Yeah. then your agent left the business and you found yourself

[00:05:31] **Sarah K:** Yes.

[00:05:31] **Sarah:** looking for an agent again.

[00:05:33] **Sarah K:** Yes, I did.

[00:05:34] **Sarah:** yeah, usually we don't talk about this portion on the podcast, but I think because of everything that's been going on and publishing over the last week, I think, it would be really good to kind of talk about that situation of find your, finding yourself looking for a second agent after you are already sold books.

[00:05:50] **Sarah K:** Yeah, no, absolutely. hold on When it happens. It was in, I think November or December of 2020, which, um, was. My debut year, my book came out in February of 2020, right before the pandemic really hit. And so that was obviously hard for a number of reasons. It, it was a hard year for me personally. my mom was, was who has since passed away, was very sick at the time, so I was just dealing with a lot with her.

[00:06:12] So in that year, I know like publishing really slowed down for everyone in that year. Just was not a fun year for for anyone. And then in November I find out that my agent was leaving the business permanently, and so I had the option of either possibly staying with that agency or leaving, but I knew right away that I wanted to, to leave and find my own agents again.

[00:06:34] And so, what I did this time that was a little different is that this time, when I queried previously most of my queries, even though I'd done pitch wars, I didn't get an agent through pitch wars. I got it through just sending out cold queries to people. But this time I felt okay, I have a few connections in the industry.

[00:06:50] Let me sort of use them. And so one of them was that, I was sort of considering who are the agents and agencies I'd like to work with. And I have, um, a friend and critique partner who I really, I thought her agent looked like a great, match. And so I asked her, would you refer me to your agent?

[00:07:08] And she said, yes, of course. And so she did. And her agent said, no, actually, but she was very kind and she referred me to Jennifer Laughran who is now my agent. And so I kind of, I used sort of the industry connections I had. I, one agent I queried who also offered, I'd met at a conference and another agent was actually one of the agents who'd offered representation previously on my first book.

[00:07:33] And I went, Back to her again because I, I'd spoken to her and I really liked her. I strongly considered going with her the first time around. And so now that I had these connections, it was actually a much quicker process. I know that this is not, again, this is not typical and I feel like some people might

be, uh, be slightly mad at me for saying this, but I, I, I received an offer of representation a day after I left my, my original agency.

[00:07:58] So I, I, I realized that I, I lucked out, especially given the timing, but I, I think. the timing was right and I think I just also lucked out like people like, um, my friend and others who really helped me along by helping me to kind of use those connections that I'd built up over the two years so that it was a quicker process this time around.

[00:08:16] **Sarah:** All right. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your query letter for

[00:08:22] **Sarah K:** Sure. And, um, for this I'm going to, Not use the names of other agents besides my current agents. dear Jennifer Lawren, I am a published middle grade writer seeking new representation. My previous agent, is leaving the business. Another agent referred me to you. Obviously I used the actual names.

[00:08:42] Thank you so much for agreeing to take a look at my materials. My debut Get a Grip Vivy Cohen was published by Dial Books for Young readers. In February, 2020, it received star reviews from Kirks school library, journal and book list. My next book, the Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family, will be published in March of 2021.

[00:09:02] Also from Dial. Both books were edited by Dana Chidiac. I am preparing to submit a proposal from my option book to my publisher. My contract enables me to submit a proposal based on five chapters and a synopsis. I will be submitting a contemporary upper middle grade novel. Second take summer. I'm currently working on a draft and can share the partial manuscript.

[00:09:25] 12 year old Maddie Simmons. Can't wait for a summer at drama camp. Maddie wants to write the next great superhero movie. This time starring an awkward fat girl. When she arrives at camp, Maddie is confronted with two major problems. First, the Screenwriting program has been canceled. Maddie, who has an anxiety disorder, must perform in the school musical.

[00:09:47] Were still, she has share the stage with her former best friend, Chloe Winters. Chloe is trying to escape her faltering career as a child actor and overbearing stage mom. While starring in the musical, chloe develops a crush on her new friend and co-star. A girl. Confronted with this surprise. She isn't sure how to process her feelings.

[00:10:09] Chloe needs a trusted confidant so he, she tries to earn back Maddie's friendship. Maddie has different plans. She can't forgive Chloe for humiliating her several months before. After Maddie takes part in a revenge prank, the possibility of reconciliation fades. Now the girls need to decide whether they can be friends again or if they've hurt each other too much for a second chance.

[00:10:30] Second Take Summer is a contemporary novel told in dual points of view. The novel has two timelines. As the novel follows the Girls' Summer Adventures, the story of their tumultuous school year also unfolds. It will appeal to fans of Tonight Owl from Dogfish and Drum roll please. I'm happy to provide a partial manuscript on request.

[00:10:51] If you would prefer to wait for me to complete the full manuscript, please let me know. Sincerely, Sarah Kapit. And, um, because the book is out now, just a few things. The titles change, it's now Second Chance Summer, and a few details about the book's plot have also changed, but it is still basically the same book about two former best friends at theater camp and what they get up to.

[00:11:11] **Sarah:** Awesome. Thanks for sharing. all right. So that is interesting because your query letter mentioned that this was gonna be your option book. Did that book end up going with Dial.

[00:11:20] **Sarah K:** Actually, that's sort of a long story because, yes, actually what happened was after a while actually I went back and forth with my editor for a bit. She had some suggestions. she didn't accept the initial proposal, but eventually she and Dial agreed to publish the book. However, I, while they were negotiating the contract, Dana left and moved to McMillan to Henry Holt books for young readers.

[00:11:41] And because they hadn't yet signed, we hadn't yet signed the contract, dial, gave me a choice and actually McMillan agreed that they would buy the book for basically the same terms. If I wanted to move with Dana to, to Henry Holt, and since I lo, absolutely love Dana. For me it was an easy decision and so they did buy the option, but.

[00:12:00] well, they were going to actually, but I moved with my editor, which I realized, most people don't get to do. So I'm, I was very lucky that the timing worked out, and again, it sort of was aided because it was still during the pandemic and everybody was being slow on everything. And so the contract process being slow kind of enabled me to move with my editor.

[00:12:17] **Sarah:** Hmm. All right, cool. So how do you feel like your experience has been since signing that first contract? Especially let us know what about publishing surprised you along the way?

[00:12:29] **Sarah K:** Um, well, I guess having been surprised about how long everything takes because, I mean, the first book came out two years. And I mean, honestly, so much has happened in this two years just for, for me, independently of being a writer, but also just everything that happened with the pandemic. It is that we are living in a, a different world now.

[00:12:49] And I guess, I guess every how long everything takes really has been a major thing to adjust you, because I'm an impatient person. I just don't want things to happen now. And I guess I've just had to learn to be slightly less impatient if, if I wanted to get by in this industry.

[00:13:03] **Sarah:** All right. It is time for the quick round. I call it author dna. Are you a pantsner or a plotter?

[00:13:10] **Sarah K:** Pantsner

[00:13:11] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an overwriter or an underwriter?

[00:13:14] **Sarah K:** uh, it depends, but more often override.

[00:13:16] **Sarah:** Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night?

[00:13:19] **Sarah K:** Afternoon,

[00:13:20] **Sarah:** When starting a new project, do you typically start with character or plot or concept or something else first?

[00:13:26] **Sarah K:** typically character all the way

[00:13:28] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:13:30] **Sarah K:** coffee,

[00:13:30] **Sarah:** When writing? Do you prefer silence or some kind of sound

[00:13:33] **Sarah K:** music is, is good.

[00:13:34] **Sarah:** when it comes to the first draft, are you a get it down kind of person or get it right kind of person?

[00:13:40] **Sarah K:** I'm more of a get it right

[00:13:42] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:13:45] **Sarah K:** s scribner,

[00:13:46] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:13:48] **Sarah K:** revising,

[00:13:49] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:13:51] **Sarah K:** uh, mostly sequential, but occasionally I'll switch it up.

[00:13:54] **Sarah:** Hmm. Final quick round question. Are you an extrovert or an introvert? I.

[00:13:58] **Sarah K:** Uh, definitely an introvert.

[00:14:00] **Sarah:** So now we're gonna talk about the second Q. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey, and do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them, or how did they shake out?

[00:14:10] **Sarah K:** well, I guess I've always worried about sales and, one thing I've realized, It's again, like debuting during 2020 is sort of a unique experience, but I think for a lot of middle grade authors especially, is that you focus so much on your sales right out of the gate. And for me, with Vivy Cohen, they weren't great sales out of the gate, but slowly it kind of got some critical recognition and it's sort of just, it's built up and it's still like three years later, it's selling at like a steady, rate.

[00:14:37] And so I've been really pleased with that and I kind of, it kind of taught me that maybe. Especially with middle grade, it's not just kind of where you start, it's that things can build slowly over time and I hope, hopefully, well that applies to a career as well, that it's, kind of a slow build over time.

[00:14:53] **Sarah:** Yeah, I feel like middle grade definitely has a longer tail than a lot of other categories.

[00:14:58] **Sarah K:** Yeah, that's, that's one of the, the nice things about it for sure.

[00:15:01] **Sarah:** All right. As time for the third Q, do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different or interesting or unique?

[00:15:10] **Sarah K:** Honestly, my writing process can be a bit difficult at times. I'm pantsier I I kind of don't know what I'm doing, but I think I, I do a lot of rewriting in the early stages of, I. Of writing a book is that, with a few exceptions most of the books I've written, I haven't like, just written a draft from start to finish.

[00:15:28] I write the beginning and then I write the beginning again until I'm sure that I have it right. which Scrivener is good for this kind of writing. It's, it's not always the most fun, but, I think for me it's sort of what works.

[00:15:41] **Sarah:** I do think it's interesting that you're a pantsier and a get it right person because that's a rare combination.

[00:15:47] **Sarah K:** I think that's what makes it so painful, but, but it's just the way things, I mean, I've tried outlining and it just doesn't work for me, and I've tried fast drafting and that doesn't usually work for me either. I mean, actually for my debut it kind of did, but that book just sort of came out of me all at once.

[00:16:04] But for my other books, since it's been more difficult and I've sort of just accepted that, that's kind of the way it is for me most of the time. And that's okay.

[00:16:12] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, whenever that was for you, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:16:19] **Sarah K:** I think just the good moments are worth it and. In, in particular the industry kind of, sometimes it feels like you don't have a lot of control and that that can be pretty difficult. But for me, um, one of the best moments was there was a teacher who did a kind of a virtual book club and she, she chose a Vivy Cohen for one of the books and I did.

[00:16:41] kind of a, just a q and A on Zoom with, with the kids, and that was what they, they asked me, they kept asking me for a sequel and I had to explain, well, I can't control if there's a sequel, but they really, they said, I, they will buy

10 copies each, which although I doubt that their parents will buy them 10 copies of the same book.

[00:16:58] It was just, the sentiment was just so wonderful to hear that. Things like that just sort of like kept, kind of, kept you going and kind of just make you feel good when there's. Obvious industry issues going around.

[00:17:10] **Sarah:** That's so sweet.

[00:17:11] **Sarah K:** Mm-hmm. Yes. Yes.

[00:17:13] **Sarah:** Do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you'd like to let listeners know about so they can avoid the same ones?

[00:17:20] **Sarah K:** I think sometimes my mistake was that if a good thing happens in publishing, you can sort of be tricked into thinking that, that that's the norm. Like my first book got three star reviews out of three reviews, and that's probably never going to happen again. And I just, the fact that it just happened to me straight off the bat made me think, oh, like this is normal.

[00:17:41] I'm always gonna get the multiple starred reviews. And it doesn't always work out that way. And you just kind of have to learn to accept it. And it's not because of you or because you're getting worse or anything. It's just sometimes it's this, the way that, that, that cookie crumbles and, that's kind of the way it goes.

[00:17:56] And so you kind of can't just keep kind of fixating on the past or expecting things will always be good and just enjoy them while they are good because they, there are gonna be those highs and lows.

[00:18:08] **Sarah:** Yeah. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:18:14] **Sarah K:** well since we're talking about agents and leaving, possibly agents leaving or you deciding to leave your agents, I think for me, you deserve to have an agent who responds to you promptly and who loves your work and who fights for you with publishers. so I know a lot of writers right now are in the position where they're, they've been unfortunately dumped by their agency, or even if they haven't, and I think you don't deserve to be kind of a second choice or people to just kind of string you along because, oh, they might be able to get a sale for you.

[00:18:46] And so I think just really consider. Where you are and if that's kind of the place you wanna be. Because for me, I've never regretted leaving my, agency when the, a, my, first agent left the business that it's just, it's been two and a half years since, and I'm just so glad that I, was able to choose my own agent because you don't get to choose very much in this industry.

[00:19:06] And so you just have to kind of take the choices when, when you can to the extent that you can.

[00:19:11] **Sarah:** Yeah. This is not a business that most of us succeed in on our own. You mentioned them, some of them already, but who are, are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:19:22] **Sarah K:** Um, well, Gail and, and Mike, who were my mentors for sure, Adriana, who um, was my longtime critique partner and also, um, Meera Trehan, author of. the view from the Best House in town, uh, which is a wonderful, absolutely wonderful book. Um, she, she's been, she's a really wonderful person as well.

[00:19:40] Like we talk about, um, industry things and look at each other's writing. um, and also, uh, my editor, Dana, that she's been here, um, since the beginning and actually for any writer who's been dumped by their agency, I would recommend going to your editor. And Dina was so sweet when my first agent left the business, she immediately wrote me an email. She's like, so I know you're without an agent. but you know, if you have any questions that you would ask an agent, you could just ask me, which, I just thought there was like the sweetest thing, even though, I mean an editor and agents do fulfill different roles and I think, which she knows and I, I know, but it's just the kind gesture just really, stuck with me that she, she was kind of to, to do that. And, so, so, so for sure, definitely her as well.

[00:20:22] **Sarah:** Nice. Meera has also been on Queries, Qualms & Quirks before

[00:20:25] **Sarah K:** Oh, okay. All of my, all the people I know. Okay,

[00:20:29] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:20:29] **Sarah K:** Yeah.

[00:20:30] **Sarah:** Since you told us about your most recent release, before you go, do you wanna tell us a little bit about Get a Grip Vivvy Cohen.

[00:20:38] **Sarah K:** Sure. Vivy Cohen is a novel in letters, the premise of it is that, it stars 11 year old Viv Cohen who is an autistic girl and a baseball lover. And she throws a knuckle ball, which is a special pitch. um, her hero is the fictitious pitcher, VJ Capello. And the book is in her letters to him and she writes to him about her innermost desires and about the exciting events in her life when she is recruited to join a local baseball team.

[00:21:11] And she writes to him about her first season and to her surprise, he writes back.

[00:21:16] **Sarah:** Awesome. Sarah, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:21:21] **Sarah K:** absolutely.

[00:21:22] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries Qualms and Quirks. You can find the text of Sarah's Query and the show notes, along with links to find out more about her and her books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review, telling your friends, or sharing this episode on social media.

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[00:21:56] Thank you so much for listening, and we'll see you next time.