



INTERVIEW ARCHIVES

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WITH KAYLA POSNEY

Sarah Miller brings to life the story of the four tragic sisters and Russian grand duchesses: Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, daughters of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia in *"The Lost Crown"*. Miller told not only the story of how political unrest in Russia doomed their close-knit family, but the power of the bond of sisterhood.

Miller also tells the story of Annie Sullivan, the miracle worker teacher of Helen Keller in her first novel, *"Miss Spitfire"*. The author explores the bond between teacher and student. This novel launched Miller's career as a writer and brought forth many awards and distinctions.

Miller attended Oakland University and previously worked as a booker seller and library assistant. She resides in Michigan with her family.

KAYLA POSNEY [KP]: What inspired you to tell the story of the four sisters/grand duchesses of the house of Romanov in *"The Lost Crown"*?

SARAH MILLER [SM]: "Inspiration" sounds so lofty and magical. The reality is that I've been interested in the Romanovs since at least junior high, so after *"Miss Spitfire"* this seemed like a logical step. There was never a Romanov novel that captured the history and the characters' personalities accurately enough to satisfy me, so that's what I set out to do. I also wanted to give each of the grand duchesses equal billing, since so much of the literature tends to favor Anastasia, and, to a lesser extent, Olga.

[KP]: Each girl has a very different personality. In one word, how would you describe each of the grand duchesses?

[SM]: Oh, golly. After working to create a quartet of three-dimensional personalities this feels something like a step backwards, but here goes:

Olga: Reflective

Tatiana: Selfless

Maria: Tender

Anastasia: Incisive

[KP]: Do you have a favorite of the grand duchesses? Who and why?

[SM]: I like to tell myself that I don't have a favorite, but one of my Romanov buddies insists that Maria is my favorite and...I've never felt compelled to argue with her. I'm not sure how she figured that out, seeing as I didn't know it myself.

[KP]: Tsar Nicholas II, Tsarina Alexandra, and their children were all extremely close which is different compared to most royal families. In your opinion, why was the family so close?

[SM]: It likely had a lot to do with the fact that Nicholas and Alexandra's relationship was an intense love match right from the start. The imperial couple had such a strong relationship – both couldn't help but let their adoration spill over onto their children. In her wartime letters, it's not uncommon for the empress to refer to the children collectively as "our five treasures." Like any siblings the children had their spats, but they also depended almost exclusively on each other for the majority of their companionship and entertainment. If they hadn't gotten along it would have been perfectly miserable.

[KP]: Where have you traveled in inspiration for your work?

[SM]: I visited Tusculum, Alabama, before writing "Miss Spitfire". With "The Lost Crown" I simply couldn't justify the expense. Not only is Russia far far away from the US, but the sites crucial to the Romanovs' story are also far away from each other – it's nearly 2000 miles from St. Petersburg to Tobolsk, for example. And so much has changed since the Romanovs' time. The Ipatiev house was demolished in 1977, and the interior of the Alexander Palace is essentially a shell of its former self. Almost none of the imperial family's possessions remain in their former home. Some of the walls aren't even in the same places.

[KP]: What other areas of history are you interested in?

[SM]: Anne Frank, Titanic, Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire, 1906 San Francisco earthquake, 1900 Galveston hurricane, 1918 influenza pandemic, Borden murders, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Lindbergh kidnapping, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

[KP]: What other historical fiction authors do you admire or enjoy? What authors from the past and present do you enjoy or have inspired you?

[SM]: Historical: Donna Jo Napoli, Richard Peck, Gary D. Schmidt, and Karen Cushman. General: John Steinbeck., Shannon Hale, and Cynthia Voigt.

[KP]: Lastly, if "The Lost Crown" was made into a movie, who would you cast as the four so very different sisters?

[SM]: I'm going to cheat and choose a mishmash of past and present actors. Let's just pretend they're all alive and/or the right age:

Olga – Sarah Polley

Tatiana – Anne Hathaway

Maria – a young Judy Garland

Anastasia – Virginia Weidler (Listen to the kid belt out “Lydia the Tattooed Lady” in this sound clip from *The Philadelphia Story* and you'll see why