

We Need to Talk

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

We Need to Talk

God Speaks to a Modern Girl

SUSAN BRINKMANN, OCDS

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.



Liguori

LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:
Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

To order, call 800-325-9521, or visit liguori.org

Copyright © 2012 Susan Brinkmann

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brinkmann, Susan.

We need to talk : God speaks to a modern girl / Susan Brinkmann. — 1st ed.
p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7648-2222-3

1. Brinkmann, Susan. 2. Catholic Church—United States—Biography. I. Title.

BX4705.B8464A3 2012

282.092—dc23

[B]

20120114323

Unless noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of The Redemptorists. To learn more about The Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 / 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

Contents

Introduction	7
Chapter One	13
Chapter Two	25
Chapter Three	37
Chapter Four	45
Chapter Five	55
Chapter Six	65
Chapter Seven	79
Chapter Eight	89
Chapter Nine	95
Epilogue	103
About the Author	111

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

Introduction

*At some point in the midst of
my fifty-hour-a-week job and
twenty-hour-a-weekend writing schedule,
God somehow managed to get my attention.*

Copyright 2012 by Logos Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

This story is for all those ordinary people who think a miracle could never happen to them. The “Red Sea” doesn’t part for secretaries and waitresses, but only for the few, the chosen, the holy—or so most of us think.

Read on! As impossible as it might sound, a miracle happened to me, and it did so when I was about as holy as Lady Gaga. In fact, I was what you might call a thoroughly modern girl who wore her skirts short, her jeans tight, her hair as platinum as possible, and enough makeup to cover what was nobody’s business but mine.

Yes, when that “great river in the sky” parted for me, I was just another cradle Catholic who did the whole parochial school shtick and ended up being about as interested in God as I was in watching a fly crawl up a television screen.

You see, I came of age in the early 1970s, when women gloried in the freedom to pursue any career they wanted while sleeping around and having abortions whenever birth control failed. It all felt so empowering.

Even after my marriage broke up and I was free to roam, I took great pride in living on my own terms. I worked hard, spent every dime on clothes and miscellaneous fashion accessories and dreamed of one day becoming a great writer. “This is who I am,” I would tell any man who took an interest in me, “so either accept me for who I am or go elsewhere.”

Not that I was a bad person or even half as selfish as I might sound. I sincerely wanted to marry again and raise a family, but deep down inside I was angry and hurting, as any woman would

be after being dumped by the love of her life and left near penniless after working him through college and law school. While he moved up the legal ladder, I moved down to a basement apartment and shopped for groceries at the dollar store.

But when I was writing, it all went away: the sorrow, the pain, the injustice. I would slip into another world where I could live through the minds and hearts of my characters.

Someone else in my shoes might have turned to drugs or booze, but not me. Writing was my therapy. It was how I numbed the pain. It was my passion, my great love, my life. No matter how many putdowns and letdowns I suffered, this one bright hope kept me going. Somewhere, deep down inside where God carves his mark on the soul, I just knew that this was my destiny.

At some point in the midst of my fifty-hour-a-week job and twenty-hour-a-weekend writing schedule, God somehow managed to get my attention, although it's still a wonder to me how he did it. If I hadn't written all this down more than twenty years ago, I may never have remembered the way he snuck up on me, so naturally, so softly, so I can't believe this is happening to me incredibly. It all happened right smack in the middle of my world, in between firing off letters to publishers, working a sales district from Baltimore to Portland, and dating seemingly every commit-o-phobe on the planet.

I found what I wanted, but it was nothing like what I was looking for. At the time, God was the last thing on my mind. I saw him as a severe old man with a long white beard who sat on a throne in the sky and kept tabs on all our sins. He was more like a gargoyle than a God, and the Church he created was full of misogynists who hated women and did everything in their power to keep us barefoot and pregnant.

And, in my opinion, the people who followed him were even worse. They were nothing but a bunch of geeks in thick glasses and bad haircuts who shouted “Praise the Lord!” at inappropriate times and spoke in Bible verses rather than plain English. They were “Jesus freaks,” and there was no way I would ever be like them. In fact, I can distinctly remember the time I told God that I would rather kill myself with a butter knife than turn out like one of them.

Having said all this, when you read the contents of this book, you will come to agree that what happened between God and me beginning in late 1991 was nothing short of astonishing. Sure, it’s another conversion story, but what makes mine unique is more the way God behaved than the way I did.

He came to me exactly where I was in life. He entered my world, wading into knee-deep piles of sin, slogging through the fog of my politically correct world view and dealing daily with my stubborn refusal to like him. He never once tried to make me into someone I wasn’t. He accepted me for who I was and left all the choices up to me.

As incredible as it might seem, in spite of all my resistance and utter unworthiness, he worked a gigantic miracle for me. And it wasn’t some happy little moment. It was *huge*. It was the biggest thing that ever happened to me, so big that it changed me—and my life—forever.

This is the story of that miracle, and I’m writing it for everyone who really needs to know that there is a God.

He’s not a gargoyle.

And if he’ll do all this for someone like me, he’ll do it for you, too.

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

Chapter One

I had absolutely no luck.

Some people were born winners. Not me.

*The only thing I ever won in my life was in the
fourth grade when I took first place
in the Fire Prevention Week contest.*

Copyright 2012 Liguori Publications
All rights reserved. For review only.

“Congratulations! You’re going to be married soon!” Lillian exclaimed.

“Really?” I was shocked. “Are you sure?”

“Yes! Yes! And soon!” the psychic declared, delighted with my reaction. “He’s going to be very different from you...from a much different background...maybe from another part of the country or a different religious persuasion, or maybe even an unusual ethnic background.”

Her voice trailed off as she closed her eyes and slipped into another one of her trance-like states. While she altered her consciousness, I welled up with newfound hope, feeling almost giddy inside. Did I really want to get married this badly?

I was sitting on the edge of my seat now, hoping she’d tell me more about him, like if he was handsome, sensitive, romantic, successful, and loaded to the gills—you know, all the things a modern girl looks for in a man. I didn’t think any of these qualifications was too much to ask, especially in light of all the freedom I’d have to give up in order to keep him happy, bear his kids, and hire someone to do the housework.

I decided to clear my throat to jolt her out of her trance. She opened her eyes and chuckled to herself. “You’ll never believe this, but I think he’s my nephew!”

“Are you kidding me?”

“Yes, that’s him.” She started rummaging in her handbag. “I have a picture of him in here somewhere.”

A moment later she was showing me a picture of a very handsome man, big and dark with expressive eyes—just my type. My hopes soared.

“All right, I’ll go out with him. Here’s my number,” I said a bit too quickly.

I got home, flushed and excited, and called my best friend, Pam, who recommended this particular psychic to me. “You were right about Lillian,” I gushed. “She’s great! I walked out of there believing that I might finally start having a life.”

I went on to tell her everything Lillian predicted, that I’d have three children—two boys and one girl who was not biologically mine—probably the child of this “very different” man I was going to meet who could be her nephew.

I was walking on air for days, especially after talking to Lillian’s nephew, Don, for almost two hours on the phone the week before our date. That thrilled me even more. Finally! A man I could actually talk to. We decided to spend our first date in New York City and take a helicopter ride over Manhattan. How romantic!

The night before our date, I got home from work, flipped on the television and listened to the headlines: “...Tourist helicopter crashes on the banks of Manhattan Bay. No survivors.”

This could only happen to me.

I had absolutely no luck. Some people were born winners. Not me. The only thing I ever won in my life was in the fourth grade when I took first place in the Fire Prevention Week contest. My prize was a cheap plastic trophy that broke in my book bag on the way home from school.

This helicopter crash *had* to be a bad omen. In spite of how great Don sounded, I had a sinking feeling this was going to be another date from hell.

It was.

He stepped out of the car sporting cowboy boots, Elvis sideburns, and about 100 more pounds than his picture. I knew before I opened the front door that this date was dead-on-arrival.

I tried to be fair and at least give him the benefit of the doubt, but my benevolence ended by the time we reached the Jersey turnpike.

“Did I mention my wives the other night?” he asked.

“Wives? As in plural? How many have you had?”

“Two already and I’m not even thirty. Can you believe it?”

I’m shocked.

“Talk about being down on your luck, huh?”

That makes two of us.

“I promised myself there would never be a third!”

Then why date? If you don’t want a relationship, what’s the point? Oh I get it. It’s the sex you think you’re going to get over my dead body.

“What do you say we skip the helicopter ride,” I suggested. “Especially after yesterday’s crash. It makes me woozy just thinking about it.”

“Woozy, huh? Now that you mention it, you don’t look too good.”

Thanks.

I decided never to go back to Lillian again, especially not after the way I blew off her nephew. He left thirty-seven messages on my answering machine—without a single callback—before he finally got the message.

A month later, Pam and I were browsing in a New Age bookstore, looking for we-know-not-what-but-its-got-to-be-more-than-this.

Our spiritual searching always seemed to bring us here, to the land of avatars, ascended masters, and spirit guides. We wanted to connect with the universal life force, to let it lift us to a higher state

of consciousness where our minds could be infused with a cosmic understanding of other worlds, other beings.

Of course, we had no idea that there was not one shred of evidence for any of this stuff. Not unless you count the kind that comes from either withered old men with long beards in white saris, or self-made mystics like J.Z. Knight, who claims to be channeling a 35,000-year-old warrior named Ramtha, who appeared in her kitchen one day and told her all the secrets of the universe.

Credible proof didn't matter to us at the time. We just wanted something other than the God of the Bible.

We'd been there, done that.

This other stuff was exciting.

"Let's try these crystals," Pam suggested, and held up a box of rocks. "Wow! Check this out! They retain all the energy from everything that ever touches them—humans, the elements, animals. It says this energy can be very healing!"

"Of what?"

"Mind, body, and spirit," she read from the box.

I picked up one of the rocks, hoping to feel some kind of vibration, but it just felt like cold, hard stone. Kind of like the guys I date.

We left without buying them. They were rocks, for God's sake. If rocks could heal, and we lived on a planet full of them, why were we all still suffering?

I was searching—for meaning, hope, a reason. There had to be more to life than rising before dawn every morning, driving to work, working all day to make other people rich, then coming home to eat, take a bath, go to bed, and start it all over again. Give me a break! That's not living. That's existing.

Like Oprah once said, "I really don't think God put you on earth to file invoices. People don't know how to dream anymore!"

Except me. I had a *big* dream. One day, I was going to be a writer. It was one of those things I just knew down to the very fiber of my being, although I could never explain why. But it's been that way ever since the day I picked up a John Jakes novel, read it, and turned to my now ex-husband and announced, "I could write something like this."

Don't ask me where that ever came from. I'd read hundreds of novels in my lifetime, but this time, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was born to write, as if this was my destiny all along and I was just now discovering it.

For months, I couldn't get it off my mind. It became like an obsession. I kept reading and rereading the book, studying the characters, how the plot flowed. I worked at Penn State University at the time and started keeping sheets of paper under my blotter that were full of ideas about what was to become my first novel.

Funny, but at the same time I had an overwhelming urge to return to church. I was raised Catholic and went to parochial schools my entire life, but I'd been away from the sacraments for years. The whole "God thing" just wasn't relevant.

Only once did I actually follow through with the urge to attend Mass, and I felt terribly out of place the minute I walked in the door. I spent the whole Mass sitting in the back pew waiting to be inspired. I wasn't. When it came time for Communion, I knew better than to receive, so I picked up my pocketbook and skulked out the back door like an escaped convict walking past a guard station.

The truth was, I didn't believe in what the Church professed: no sex, no birth control, no abortions.

Are you kidding me?

Fourteen years and three novels later, I was still no closer to being published. All I had to show for those years was a file full of rejection letters. I couldn't even get a letter to the editor published in the local newspaper.

But I did enjoy a few rare moments of triumph. Like the time I met a famous author at a cocktail party at my ex-husband's law school. He was an eccentric-looking, white-haired English professor who had published twenty pieces of nonfiction with Macmillan. A friend introduced me as a struggling writer.

"What do you write?" he asked.

"Fiction."

His face fell. "Oh. That's a tough market. Very tough."

"Tell me about it. Any advice?"

"That depends on how good you are," he said. "If you can write fiction, the sky's the limit. Nonfiction is a publisher's meat and potatoes. Fiction is the gravy. Big money there if you can really write it. Not too many people can write fiction. It's not the kind of thing you can learn in school. Fiction is all imagination. You either have it or you don't."

"My imagination is legendary," I said because it was true. It drove everyone nuts, including me.

It was the kind that always went one step beyond normal. I remember waking up one night and thought I heard a noise in the kitchen. It sounded like a growl, the kind that a big black bear might make. Not only did I convince myself that a bear was in our kitchen, but I swore it was making itself a bologna sandwich with lettuce and mayo. I actually heard it open the refrigerator door, peel off two bologna slices, tear up a few lettuce leaves, open the mayo jar and hunt around in the utensil drawer for a knife to spread it with. All the while I lay in bed, frozen in terror, hoping against