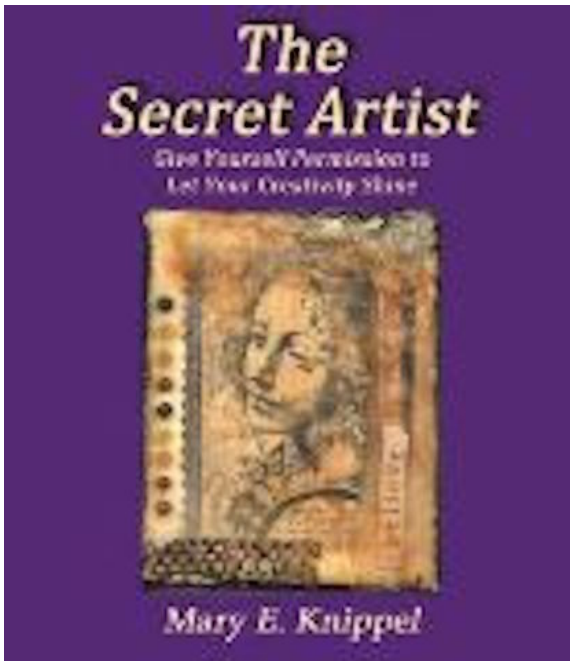


## Foreword

A Message from the #1 New York Times Best-selling Author of  
*Simple Abundance*

Navigating life's journey to one's authentic self is often challenging especially if we are embarking on our adventure without a compass. Mary E. Knippel, having successfully made her journey of discovery through a diagnosis of breast cancer, provides you with stepping stones to finding your creative self in *The Secret Artist: Give Yourself Permission to Let Your Creativity Shine*. Mary knows the courage it takes to create in the midst of crisis and her new book gives all of us permission to be our creative, authentic selves with fun and passion.

When faced with the word “artist” do you look in the mirror and declare, “I am an artist”? While this should be our declaration, we often think of artists who were unable to accept the title, much to their dismay. *The Secret Artist* gives us a positive and uplifting way to do what many artists of the past failed to recognize and understand; that the creative process is the gift of our authentic self.



In the writing of *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy*, I, too, encountered the many faces of self-doubt and her sister, self-loathing. How did I discover the simple and powerful key that Mary shares moving through the dark shadows of becoming the artist of our everyday lives?

*“By showing up. Day in day out. By not judging how it’s going. If it’s going at all, that’s enough. You can’t afford to think about how the work will be received when you’re finished. That’s not your job. Remember, we’re learning to surrender the delivery details of our dreams. Our job then is just to do it. It can’t be published, produced, performed, or purchased if it doesn’t exist.”*

A great first step for you is hidden in the pages of this book. What awaits the greatest surprise of all, the meeting of your authentic self, the secret artist of your life.

May your life and journey be blessed with self-discovery,  
Sarah Ban Breathnach

## MARY'S STORY

*My job is to keep on living.*

**"NO!"**

A pitiful wail came from the kitchen. I grimaced listening to what seemed like a high-pitched howl of a wounded animal in pain. I buried my head in my pillow in my bedroom one flight below from where the sound originated and felt hot tears on my cheek.

It wasn't an animal. It was my beautiful, sensitive daughter receiving the news of my breast cancer diagnosis. My husband's well-meaning and clumsy attempt at sparing me from telling her had gone hopelessly wrong. His method of quickly ripping off the Band-Aid had no sort of cushioning before delivering the awful blow.

"Mom had a biopsy and they found something they need to take a closer look at," he explained in his quiet, calm manner. "We're going to see a new doctor in the City today."

"I don't have school today, I want to go along," she demanded immediately. "I want to be there and meet the doctor."

My heart ached for her, yet I couldn't move from where I was curled up in a ball in my bedroom. I was both dreading and eagerly awaiting the appointment with my surgeon today. It felt as if I were sitting in a theatre watching a drama unfold. Soon the brave heroine would enter the doctor's office and have the results of her needle biopsy

explained. But there's no brave heroine here. It's just me feeling scared and helpless.

Finally meeting with the surgeon was an anti-climax after the previous ordeal of chasing down the last mammogram at the hospital and hand delivering it before I could go in for the needle biopsy. The technician was reassuring while I lay on the stainless steel table suspended in mid-air and she performed the procedure.

"Everything looks good," she had chirped. I remember those words distinctly and clung to them with all the hope and confidence I could muster.

"I'm sorry," she said apologetically when she phoned with the results. "Everything looked so good when I was getting the sample, but it is cancer."

"You said it looked good," I replied fighting to listen and not break down sobbing.

"I know and I'm sorry," the technician interjected regretting that she'd hinted at my condition before an official reading by the radiologist. "You need to find a surgeon."

I had held the phone to my ear and assumed she was still speaking to me, because I was aware of a mumbling in the distance. I didn't comprehend anything more after she uttered, "I'm sorry."

## **Breast Cancer Awareness**

Back to today, I envisioned my daughter sitting at the kitchen island eating her breakfast, watching cartoons on TV to take the edge off the fact she was really in her last year of high school and about to graduate.

A few weeks ago (was it really only a few weeks, it felt like an eternity?) the public service announcements about Breast Cancer Awareness had popped up incessantly with statistics, walks, warnings, reminders to do self-checks and get regular mammograms.

“The only thing I’m really afraid of happening,” our daughter had said one morning, pausing while spreading cream cheese on her plain bagel, “is that you will get breast cancer.”

To which I reassured her with an automatic response, “Oh, I get my mammograms regularly, so I’m fine.”

In fact, I was not. In my typical caretaker mode, I was more focused on reassuring her than making my health my priority.

### **Mammograms and Menopause**

I had a baseline mammogram before I turned 40. After that, every other year I went in to be squeezed. Sometimes the technician would good-naturedly joke about the cold plates, and a couple of times I found that heating pads were used to warm the imaging apparatus. Nevertheless, the bottom line was the ridiculousness of the whole procedure. Making a round mass flat by squeezing it between glass plates to x-ray it sounds inhumane and like a form a torture.

I started to think about my past. When I was in my late 20’s, my mother developed a tumor in her uterus the size of a grapefruit. She

had to have a hysterectomy. My father had died of kidney cancer when I was in my 30's, after a long painful year.

Were those my warning signs?

I had just celebrated my 50th birthday. I had never been pregnant (my husband and I adopted our wonderful daughter, when she was 6 weeks old). As a young woman, I had taken birth control. After menopause, I had taken hormone replacement for 2 ½ years. I had no idea these things meant I could be marked for breast cancer.

C is for Continuing with Life

The day of the biopsy I attended the Homecoming Assembly. I proudly watched our daughter perform her duties as part of the Leadership Class. One of only nine seniors chosen out of 300, she stood in the middle of the auditorium announcing Homecoming details. My body was there, but my mind was not paying attention. I had an ice pack on my right breast. Did my chest look strange? Looking around the gym, the students were excited to be out of class and goofing off before the big game and dance tonight. It was OK. I was only another mom in the crowd. It didn't matter to them that this mom's mind was still focused on the morning's events.

The radiologist had assured me that cysts have to be checked out all the time and they usually turn out to be "calcifications." The biopsy was a "routine exam" to be sure nothing abnormal was going on. If there is," she reassured me that "early detection results in early intervention and a much better prognosis for being cured."

I was guided to the perfect surgeon. When I called on Friday the voice mail message informed me office hours were Monday thru

Thursday. I left a message and prepared myself for another weekend in limbo.

“This is Dr. Lewis,” the kind voice on the phone reassured me. “I just wanted to respond to your voice mail and get you set up with an appointment as soon as possible.” She said she regularly checks the messages because she didn’t want anyone worrying over the weekend if they call for a consultation. Before we hung up, I had an appointment for Monday and a sense of relief that I was in the good hands of a very caring human being for the next steps along my healing journey.

Now it’s appointment day and we’re headed to meet my surgeon and find out about the next part of my breast cancer journey.

I resolved that “my job” was to keep on living—and to do it to the absolute best of my ability with joy, grace and gratitude.

I give myself a break, and permission to stop “stopping myself.” I decided it is time to say “yes” to that part of me who wants to be creative.

Now I invite you to think about your story...

1. Describe a milestone or life crisis along with all the associated emotion and anticipated outcome. How have you changed since this event?
2. Where do you find comfort and help?
3. How do you stop yourself from being present in your life?