



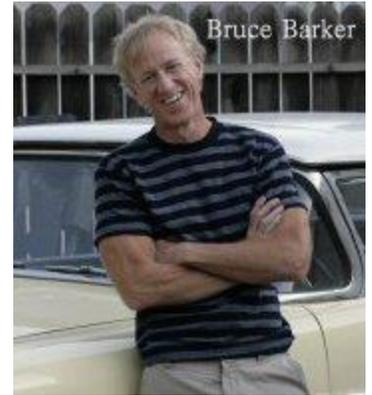
TM: Our guests today are returning: Sarah Barker -- Sarah, nice to speak with you again.

Sarah Barker: Nice to speak with you! Thank you!

TM: And your intrepid husband Bruce Barker. Bruce, thank you for joining us; nice to meet you!

Bruce Barker: Wow look at me, now I need a tee-shirt that says "intrepid!"

TM: [laughs] People might mistake you for a starship.



Bruce: The S.S. Intrepid.

TM: The S.S. Intrepid...that's -- or, or the B.B. Intrepid.

Sarah: Oooh...!

Bruce: Nicely done!

TM: I, I think there's a, there's a Star Trek font in this, in a tee-shirt; in your future; just a guess. So before we get into our topic today...yes I'm going to ask, and yes you have to tell the story -- the romance: how did you two meet?

Bruce: Oh boy who leads....

Sarah: Ah, who's going to take this one....

Bruce: Ah! We both ask each other...okay, how about, let's see, I'll, I'll lead off: okay, so just so you know, here's a little back-story: ah, locally I have a voice agent and the office in which they're located -- I, I go there once in a while, I show up all bedraggled, messed up, and you know I mean you gotta look that way -- "you have the top down" -- "oh I don't have the top down!" as much as I used to but that's another story -- but uh so I walk into this place and lo and behold -- I, I didn't know it at the time but here was this goddess who was the studio manager who -- you never expect this in real life, but she was, um, unattached, shall we say, and you know I, I was figurin' there's, there's twenty guys that have asked her out just today alone --

TM: [laughs] Before breakfast, even!

Bruce: Exactly! So I'm not gonna bother, I'll just come in, I'll do my little, you know, voice thing or audition or whatever it was at the agency -- you know which I did show up there occasionally -- still do -- and then actually one day Sarah made the first move -- and I'm, I'm flabbergasted, I'm thinking there's [chuckles], there's no way, she must be thinking I'm the next guy who walked in --

Sarah: A girl can't wait forever.

Bruce: I guess -- it was a lesson to me -- I'm not sure what the lesson was but it was, it was ummm...welcome.

TM: So Sarah how, how honest a retelling of the venture was that?

Sarah: Uh, I-I'm just glad it's radio so you can't see the, the blush but it, it's really accurate, you know I waited for Bruce to ask me out for too many months and I finally said, you know what, this is the twenty-first century I can --

Bruce: Yeah I -- wow! it worked out just wonderfully, obviously, but uh, yeah, that was a big surprise -- you know you go into things like that thinking -- well, you, you know the old phrase: baaahhr, she's out of my league --

Sarah: Aw...

Bruce: But uh...whaddaya know! [laughs]

TM: So as we mentioned in our last conversation about the Sunday assembly, you have a production company called Right After This. How did that get started?

Bruce: Well, it dates back a little bit; you probably hear a little radio -- uh, what -- twang or something or other in my voice -- way back in the dark ages, um, I was just specifically radio, and got into doing voice-work in the '90s, um, for cable television and um, as the 2000s dawned it suddenly occurred to me that, you know, there's probably a lot more voice-work going on than just the local cable channel where you're talking about dry cleaners and shouting about the great used cars down at Joe's Car Lot. And about that same time we put in a bid on some radio equipment that had been in use at Universal Studios Hollywood and um -- this bid was kind of just sort of back-doored -- I don't think anybody else was even informed that this stuff was up for bid -- lo and behold it was this monstrous studio setup they'd had for about two years at Universal Studios; they had dismantled it, put it in a warehouse, then ah you know one day this thing comes in -- says, hey uh Bruce, we uh we know you used this equipment once at Universal; do you wanna put a bid on it? Well, sure! So all of a sudden then we had an office full of equipment and no office. So, uh, you know, found an office locally, here in the L.A. area, and um set up shop and said, all right! let's start a production company! So that was about 2001 or thereabouts and uh it just kind of grew up there. Originally it was audio-only; about four or five years ago we started doing video as well as a production company -- obviously Sarah had done tons of that prior to that -- but you know as a company with a presence and a brick-and-mortar shop, as it were, it's just been growing leaps and bounds.

TM: Sarah what do you want to add to that?

Sarah: It's just been such a treat -- you know I came from television, from working in television, first for Technicolor so it was kind of a bigger studio system and then a boutique industry, kind of a mom-and-pop post-production shop -- which is really common out here in L.A., you know it's kind of two different ways of working and, um, this has been really refreshing because you know now when we get hired to do video work -- I mean yes we're beholden to clients but I mean it's very creative, you know, you have a lot of creative license to work, and to, to find a way to tell a story that's really effective and, you know, the client will typically trust you with that because they know that that's what you do and, it's, it's just been such a treat and really refreshing because I -- you know I went to film school and that's what I, what I wanted for my life when I went to film school and when I came out the other side, you know, I did a long stint working in T.V. and it wasn't as creative as I thought it was going to be working in television. It was actually kind of like putting the lettuce or the tomato on the hamburger, so this has just been really rewarding, to be highly creative.

TM: Excellent. Well, what we're going to be talking about today is your project You Are Here TV. So what is that and what made you decide to do it?

Sarah: Okay, well, it's kind of a crazy story, and uh, it all really kinda begins with one of my dearest friends, She-Who-Shall-Not-Go-Named -- but I adore her dearly -- I remember many years ago a book called "The Secret" came out and it was just sweeping the nation and you know Oprah had it on her show and it was just this huge kind of cultural meme and everyone was just glomming onto this -- you know, you can, you can use your mind to create reality --

TM: The Law of Attraction.

Sarah: Ah, The Law of Attraction, right. So this book comes out and my girlfriend and I bought it and we're checking it out and I was completely appalled because I had been studying Buddhism for many, many years

and I thought, well this is just basically -- I don't know if I'm allowed to say "bastardizing;" I don't know if I'm allowed to say that, um --

TM: You can on a podcast.

Sarah: I can on your podcast, okay.

TM: You can on this podcast, yeah.

Sarah: Oh great. [laughs] It was basically -- to me it was bastardizing Buddhism. You know, it was just this idea of, I can meditate and I can create diamond rings and sports cars and the man of my dreams. And I decided I wanted to set out to create a film to debunk it. And so I located this Church of Science of Mind, which is really where "The Secret" comes from -- you know it comes from, um, Church of Religious Science and Science of Mind, which, you know, sprung up in the late 1800s and then it had a resurgence in the early '50s with Ernest Holmes -- and I started making a film about this particular organization. And as strange as it might sound, it kind of helped me to come out to myself about my secularist tendencies. And it went from being a documentary -- a featured documentary to debunk "The Secret" to I want to make this show about secularism and about how religion is changing and it's moving away from conventional religion because I think we're outgrowing it. I think we're outgrowing as a, as a species and as a culture; I believe that we're outgrowing conventional religion. And so...it kind of just morphed and it became something else and now it's really become for me a show about secularism in Los Angeles and what that actually looks like, and it really doesn't look anything like what I think a lot of people believe about humanists -- you know, which is that we're hedonistic, we're immoral, you know, we don't care about anybody but ourselves, or they think Ayn Rand, they think "The Fountainhead," you know, they think this kind of crazy social -- you know this [laughs] -- so I really kinda wanted to present another way to look at what it means to be an atheist and that it's, it's, you can still do good works, you can still provide -- be of service in your community. You just don't believe in a God concept, you know, it's --

TM: Yeah you're still a human being, you still love, you still are inspired, you can still inspire others, you still find value in being a person, and living, and being with others.

Sarah: Right. Yeah! It's, you know, it's, it's just a lack of belief in, in something that's potentially superstitious.

TM: So Sarah, with your awareness yourself of your secularism and facing that while having a Buddhist practice, was there any kind of transition or was that somewhat difficult for you -- were there a few things that helped you sort out in being Buddhist and doing this practice?

Sarah: Well yeah and you know it's funny because -- I know we're going to be, you know, getting to the episode I just finished later but it's gonna eventually kinda be a good segue because really so much of how all this happened for me and I'm -- I'm pretty open about this and I talk about it pretty freely but I am a recovering bulimic, and I was in a twelve-step program for bulimia for about nineteen years -- I got in very early; when I was nineteen or twenty I got in a twelve-step program to help me with my eating disorder -- and ah, for years I tried to reconcile the twelve-step program -- really, it's a spiritual program, and you know the idea -- and this is pretty clearly said, articulated in the first couple of steps, is that you come to believe in a power greater than yourself who will restore you to sanity -- and that's virtually verbatim, the second step of that program. So I, I'm in this program, and I'm really trying to make myself believe in this higher power and -- you know, when I first go in I was living up in Humboldt County, which is a crazy-hippie-marvelous-wacky town, and it was a good place for someone like me to begin my twelve-step recovery because there nobody ever talked about God. You know they would talk about the trees, they would talk about the Redwoods, and at that time that was accessible to me and that was my higher power. When I moved back down to this area, Los Angeles, it was a very different dynamic -- uh, at meetings -- and, um, there was a lot of God. There was a lot of God present in the rooms that I was sitting in. And I stayed and I tried to make it work and I tried to reconcile it and every once in a while I would speak openly about my struggle with this second step and I would feel this kind of -- I felt like a pariah in the rooms, you know, and about that time -- and this would have been about ten years ago -- I started studying Tibetan Buddhism. I found a Tibetan Buddhist sangha here in my area, and I attended for several years, and it was really transformative for me: I learned how to meditate; I learned how to pull myself

into my body and be present and be mindful, be paying attention to what's happening in my body -- this was really great for my recovery in a lot of ways although I still really struggled -- but there was too much religiosity for me in that particular I guess sect of Buddhism, so I found another organization that was more secular in nature. And I think between what was happening for me in the twelve steps and what I was feeling happening to me in trying to work these steps in a program that's religious -- but -- and, and also at the same time really sinking into a Buddhist practice, and really kind of, I guess you could say coming to believe that there isn't a higher power, that can res -- that you know I don't need to be restored to sanity, I'm already sane and that what I'm experiencing is actually just the human condition, that it's not -- that there's nothing insane about it -- and I think between those two things I really started to, you know, understand who I was or what, what did make sense to me or how I wanted to look at the world, the universe, and, and you know my place in it and, and um, I don't know if that answers the question but, yeah, it was a couple of things coming together that created it I think.

TM: So how are you dividing up the work load for the show; Bruce I understand you have quite a few hats that you wear?

Bruce: Yeah, yeah, and some of them are funny hats, and some of them are serious hats. I sort of came in on this sort of obliquely I think because you know Sarah is definitely the storyteller; she's the one -- I mean I'm talking just everything from, uh, camera angles to you know the story ideas to a whole lot of the real basic stuff that you put together, you know, on a series like this that uh, you know, makes it not just watchable but interesting, you know things that you wanna, that you wanna, you keep following, you see one episode and you go, I gotta see another one of those. I was able to lend expertise I think in a few different areas; uh, the main one that you will notice is, is I tend to be sort of a stand-up on-camera guy, just you know sort of the interstitial guy, the narrator, you know whatever the position would be, sort of talking about the subject transitioning from one scene to the next, that sort of thing, sort of explaining things as it goes -- you know kind of the typical narrator or host-type figure in some of these episodes. But then behind the scenes I, I also supply some graphics expertise -- I'm one of these guys who likes -- I'm a gear-nut -- that applies to the physical gear in terms of, ah, you know, anything from, ah, gadgetry to carburetors to whatever -- but as well software and figuring out things, how things work, so ah, so I got into animation quite a while ago, when, you know, when Macintoshes were still black and white!

TM: And RenderMan 1.0 is out.

Bruce: Exactly! But ah -- so I've been able to lend some help there as well and um, some help in terms of sound because my background -- and Sarah's as well -- my background, very much of it, is in editing and sound and reproduction of audio and some of the various aspects there, a lot of it from the commercial world, which lends itself really well to film and narrative documentary. So, yeah, it's a lot of hats but you know I kind of like it that way because it lets you exercise more of your muscles as it were; it's nice to be able to lend all five fingers of one hand rather than just one. I really enjoy it.

TM: Yeah, you can be more creative in your exploration of those different aspects of what you contribute to the overall project.

Bruce: Yeah. I think that's true. And you know it really is creative 'cause I can't think of -- you know Sarah mentioned a while ago about putting the lettuce and the tomato on the hamburger at the fast-food joint and you know I -- a lot of my experience in radio was the same: there's a lot of manual assembly of things where you have no creative control. That's not so much to say so much on-air necessarily, although with the big corporations it really is that way on-air now, but certainly in making radio commercials a lot of that stuff is dictated by a, you know, a copywriter or some other person involved in the project so by the time it gets to you as the production person, the person who's actually assembling it, even if you're voicing it or having somebody else do that, you don't have a lot of creative control. So when you're building a project from ground zero, from the ground up, it's wonderful because you can just toss around ideas and go, well, let's see if this works, and sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't, but -- but it allows you to sort of experiment and get some new ideas out there which you, you know, in regular production life you don't get to do.

TM: So it's early on; you've just completed your third episode; tell us what your subjects have been so far.

Sarah: You know because the show originally wasn't going to be a show -- it was going to be a feature -- the first two episodes are actually the same topic but it's two parts because I, I had so much material that I realized, wow, this is too long -- you know, this is, it's a documentary web series -- which I'm hoping to get picked up, you know, but right now it's a documentary web series and so it was really too long for web delivery. So I basically split it up. But it was about the Church of Science of Mind, you know this -- where The Law of Attraction comes from, you know this whole idea of, um, you know, we-don't-really-believe-in-God-we-believe-in-energy, uh, you know, we-believe-in-love, you know, love-is-God, is, is kind of the, I think the ideology behind it. And I, you know, initially I had planned on taking a, the perspective of, you know I think I mentioned earlier kind of a basher -- but I just decided to just take the high road and keep the emphasis on -- if you watch it, you know, we kind of raise some questions around, well, you know, if it's not God, if it's energy, then why don't you just call it energy, I mean why don't you just, you know, I'm sure we can all agree that energy exists, you know I can flip a light switch and the light comes on, yeah, energy exists -- we raise some questions like that, but you know for the most part we just kind of let the whole story play out, and you know what we did is we -- I found a guy named Harry Moses who's a Science of Mind minister here in Burbank and you know we kind of -- we also went to this really kooky expo -- it was a New Age expo -- and that was just wild -- we, boy, it was just [chuckles] really out there, some of the -- you know it's just -- it's really interesting to see how some of the new American religions that have come out of the last maybe hundred years or so, you know, Scientology and Church of Religious Science/Science of Mind, they're all just really -- some of them are just really kooky. But to me it's an outcropping of I-don't-know-that-we-can-really-connect-as-much-as-we-used-to to the conventional idea of some guy with a long white beard and a staff sitting on a throne intervening in your life constantly, judging you; I think that we're kind of as a culture finding ways to make more meaning or to understand, you know, quote-unquote "God" in a different way and I find that interesting, and you know what I believe is that -- what I believe personally is that eventually God might disappear. What I want to play around with is, you know did God create us or did we create God. And I think that that's really what I'm wanting to explore a little bit and look at.

TM: And so that's the first couple of episodes -- and the third one you're putting out: what about that one?

Sarah: Uh that one actually is about an organization called The Secular Organizations for Sobriety. This is a story of a guy who actually has a really similar story to my own -- I think that's what appealed to me so much about the topic was I really could relate to his trajectory -- but he was a serious, serious alcoholic, um, really -- kinda losing everything, lost his wife, you know, life-falling-apart alcoholic. And he is an atheist. And he tried to do a lot of different things; you know he tried therapy, gestalt therapy, in-patient treatment, and he also tried A.A., you know, for many years, and just couldn't make it work, couldn't resonate with the spirituality of the program, and so he went out and he started basically in his kitchen -- it's funny 'cause the way it started was a lot like the way A.A. started, you know -- it started in his house, on his kitchen table, he developed a support group for alcoholics, addicts, compulsive eaters, [indistinguishable] folks who are friends and family of alcoholics, they're all welcome at the same meetings. And he started these meetings that were secular in nature. And, you know, it's interesting he and one of the meetings in our area were kind enough to allow us to come in and film the meeting and we just blurred likeness so that no one appeared in the show, you know, their anonymity was protected, but what was really interesting is that not everybody that goes to these meetings are secular, you know; for some of them, they're religious; they just don't want to bring that into their recovery, or they don't like the idea of a sponsor, or having to rely on someone else to make decisions for them or to tell -- you know it, it's, there's other aspects of the twelve steps that they're struggling with. And so they do this, you know, Secular Organization for Sobriety, and it's been around now for about thirty-five years; it's international now, it's all over the world; and the Center for Inquiry -- actually the National Center for Inquiry -- um, has been financially supporting it -- although, they've now been cut off, so S.O.S. runs the risk of disappearing forever if we can't raise them some money; and the founder Jim Christopher has been sober for thirty-five years so, you know, obviously you don't need God to get sober is the moral of that one I think -- but um, it's a really great alternative if you're struggling with addiction but you're having a hard time with the religiosity of the twelve-step model.

TM: You know it's interesting that you bring up that there are religious people there as well because I see that as one of the strengths of a secular approach in a lot of things -- like Buddhism for example or these kinds of programs that with a secular approach it focuses on what we do know as human beings in this lifetime, and

what you believe about spiritual matters can be independent of that, it can be highly integrated into how you live your life, but what we do focus on with secular matters is you, and that still carries over whether or not you're of a particular religious faith -- it still works with these kinds of programs because it's based on what you are as a human being.

Sarah: Yeah, that's enough it seems like, you know, I mean just this one lifetime is...plenty.

TM: Yeah, it can be long, yeah. Anything surprising to you yet in just the bit of work that you're doing in -- bear in mind it's early on in this venture; you've lots more coming but anything surprising come up yet?

Sarah: This has been such an amazing experience for me -- I um, I have learned a lot; you know I think probably the biggest thing that I'm learning is that you know within the secular community there is a lot of different approaches to it. I think it's kinda like being a little kid, you know and then when you become a teenager or maybe when you get your first hair on your chest or you know whatever that rite of passage is, for a teen suddenly you think you know everything about what it means to be x, you know, this, a grown-up or a teenager or whatever. And I kind of feel like, once I finally admitted to myself and to others that I was in fact an atheist, I really thought that atheism looked a certain way and it was called "atheism." And even though I'd heard of the terms "humanism" and "secularism," I always kind of wrote them off because I thought that they all meant the same thing. And I think what people are teaching me is that there are nuances between those terms, that vernacular, that are important to people, and that people really value, and that there are really hardline atheists, and then there are people who are a little bit softer around it, and then the term "agnostic" is a little bit more nebulous than I'd once realized, and it's just, I'm kind of learning that there is a lot of complexity around what it means to be secular and my take on that is that I kinda feel like we're, we're still exploring what it means as a culture, you know, it's kind of a new -- well, in terms of it being -- it's growing, but I think -- in L.A., what I see in L.A. -- is that it's growing really fast, and I think that we're all still trying to figure it out, what it means, you know, what it means in the context of culture, what it means in the context of community, what it means in the context of parenting. So it's been interesting, it's been really educational for me so far.

TM: Yeah and I'm wondering if, even with folks who are very much in agreement about their approach to secularism, there is still variety as individuals in how they communicate it and how they integrate it with their lives.

Sarah: Yeah! It's very personal. But I'm also seeing that there is this need -- you know I think when we came on, I talked to you not too long ago on an episode about another community that's starting and -- there does seem to be this desire to make more community around it. And I don't know if this is because I come from secular Buddhism where I, I feel like -- I kinda feel like Buddhists are a little bit more internal -- and not to say that community is not important, but I don't know that it -- in my experiences community may not be as important as let's say that it might be for a Christian or you know somebody who's -- it's a very shared experience whereas Buddhism seems a little bit more internal.

TM: So how are your guests responding to the show?

Sarah: You know, really really well! And you're right, this is really, this is really kind of new, you know I haven't been doing this too long but the first couple of episodes, the response was interesting and I think, I think it was interesting because they knew that I was secular and it was a little -- I sensed a little bit of, um, mistrust from some folks that they were gonna be painted in a certain light because I wasn't one of them. Uh, I would say from the secular community -- 'cause now I'm in production with Episode Four and I've kind of been doing a lot of shooting; Bruce and I have been doing a lot of shooting this last year, 'cause we were shooting for a couple of episodes -- and, uh, from the secular community it's just been very receptive and, also, what I seem to be hearing a lot of is, we really need more of this, we need more of this, we need to get this out there, we need more of this, you know why aren't more people doing this. And that -- boy, that's a great question. You know, I think that there are a lot of people doing this -- maybe not exactly the way that I'm doing it, maybe not investigative documentary style but I think that there's a lot of content around secularism but -- there seems to be a lot of warmth and receptivity to it; I haven't really come across anything to the contrary there. I suspect the project I wanna work on in the summer, which will be a feature, will probably come against a lot more push-back because of the topic, but um, so far it's been kind of easy to get people to talk to me and -- you know I

thought that people might be a little bit more reticent to talk about their secularism because it's such a boosy-boo kind of notion but that hasn't been my experience; people are -- they seem to enjoy really opening up about it and talking about it freely.

TM: Yeah that may vary based on, on where people are -- I know some listeners we have to this podcast are still very much in the closet based on their physical location in the country where really secularism is not a good thing. [laughs] They're in the Bible and they can't come out as anything but a devout Christian. Even though they're not.

Sarah: Yeah that's a great point. [laughs]

TM: But where you are, yeah things are maybe okay so [laughs] I'll keep fingers crossed for ya. So what is it you're each hoping people get out of the show?

Bruce: You know I've always viewed this as uh this is a great exploration into the unknown -- I know that sounds big and you know you mentioned Star Trek a long time ago, it sort of feels like you know if I say word like that it's like oh yeah well we're -- warp five Mr. Sulu! -- but it has been very interesting, at least for me, to, to be able to yeah hear people's stories, where they came from, how lives sort of integrate into the social norm which is very much of a sort of a religious net that, you know, our society is based on. You get to see people, uh, you know how they deal with things that are maybe overt and offense to some, and as well maybe people that are just kind of walking through life and -- you see a hundred people lined up on a city street and you can't point to who's going to believe in what or uh you know what somebody had for dinner or you know anything unless you ask. And this has been great because we've had so many great people talk about their lives and their story, their struggle if they've had struggling you know. Sarah's right in the sense that there's been so many people willing to talk -- we've probably had more challenges just setting up camera shots than we have getting people to talk to us. It's been really great for that sense I think.

TM: Sarah, how 'bout you; what are you hoping people get out of this?

Sarah: I really am hoping that it'll just kind of open a little window, and you know that's, that's one of the things I'm kind of struggling with right now with this show is, you know, who is my audience, you know, 'cause I -- part of me is like well yeah I wanna make this for fellow secularists but that's kinda preaching to the choir as it were, so I, I -- [it] would be nice if this could be targeting folks who aren't necessarily secular because I really kinda feel like if this show could maybe plant a seed in the mind of someone who was a very devout religious person, that, secular/atheist/whatever-you-choose-to-call-yourself, I believe we have a lot more in common with a devout Christian or a devout Jew or a devout Catholic or a Muslim -- than, than we don't have in common. You know I think that that basic human need for fellowship, the basic human need for love -- to love one another, to help, uh, one another -- I think that's innate; I think it is part of our D.N.A., I think it's potentially part of our evolutionary makeup, you know, just the basic need to -- I don't know, whatever, I don't wanna get too -- not -- lovey-dovey but -- you know I think that we have more in common than, than we don't have in common, and, you know, initially I wanted to bash "The Secret" -- well now I kinda just wanna obliterate the concept around "atheism," that it's not a bad word, and that if you identify as one it doesn't make you this cold-hearted fascist or you know it doesn't make you anything at all; it just means that you need proof. So that's, that's my hope for it.

TM: For folks who are listening to this podcast you can find out more about this at www.YouAreHereTV.tv and www.RightAfterThis.com for the production company. Our guests today have been Sarah Barker -- Sarah, thanks for being here, nice to speak with you again.

Sarah: Thank you so much, Ted!

TM: And Bruce Barker -- Bruce, thanks for joining us!

Bruce: Ah, man, my pleasure, thanks for asking!