

Interview Questions

for *Age before Beauty*

❖ What was the inspiration behind *Age before Beauty*?

Allie is a typical older sister, used to controlling everyone and everything. Okay, I admit it – I’m the oldest of three sisters, so a lot of Allie’s struggles came straight from my own life. Also, my middle sister gave birth to a baby right before I started writing *Age before Beauty*, so of course some of her thoughts and feelings had to show up in the story as well. I had a lot of fun blending characteristics and experiences from both of us.

❖ Do you often put yourself into your stories?

There’s a piece of me in every character I’ve ever written. If I’m going to write a believable character, one that resonates with a reader, I have to be able to get inside her head, and in order to do that I have to find some common ground with her. But often it’s just a minor element of commonality, and pretty soon the character’s personality begins to grow and take on unique qualities. Allie, for instance, is the ultimate problem solver, and that comes directly from me. But some of her conflicts—like with her mother-in-law, for instance—are all her own.

❖ When a ‘rash’ appears on Joanie’s face, Allie panics. Have you ever overreacted to a situation involving your child?

Yes, that’s one of the things I pulled from my own life. My ‘baby’ is twenty-six years old, so I had to dig into some pretty old memories. But I still remember how embarrassing it was to sit in the doctor’s office after an emergency phone call and have him tell me my infant was not dying of a terrible disease, but just had a case of gas.

❖ Eric and Allie were raised in vastly different environments, and that affects their marriage. Do you think that happens in real life?

Definitely. Children build expectations about their own romantic relationships based on what they saw growing up. So when our parents’ marriage fails, as Allie’s did, that’s bound to affect how we approach marriage. In Allie’s case, she sees similarities between Eric and her father, and she leaps to the conclusion that that Eric will one day leave her, as her father did. I had the same fears in the early years of my marriage. It took me several years of counseling and prayer, but I know I serve a God who overcomes obstacles. Today my husband and I have a strong, thriving marriage.



Age before Beauty

By Virginia Smith

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- ❖ Allie jumps head-first into a home sales business, selling makeup and cleaning products. Any basis in reality from that situation?

Not personally. That element of the story came from the accumulated experiences of several young moms I know. One is my sister, of course, who yearned to stay home with her new baby. And one is a friend of my daughter's who did quit her job and launched a makeup sales business in order to stay home with her infant. I'll be honest about something – When I first got the idea for this story, I intended to poke a bit of fun at the 'pyramid scheme' type businesses. But a funny thing happened. This young mom loves her business, and she's become wildly successful at it. She credits her business for changing her life in many ways. I interviewed several others who told me the same thing. My perception of that type of sales job totally changed. So the story became less about poking fun at that industry, and more about the extremes an obsessive personality will go to in order to accomplish her goals. I think the story is much better this way.

- ❖ Is there an overall message in *Age before Beauty*?

Well, I didn't set out to write a book with a message. I wanted to write an entertaining story with realistic characters that people can identify with. But I'm a Christian, and I write from a Christian worldview, so the hope I have in the Lord comes through in all my books. In *Age before Beauty*, I hope readers walk away with a renewed sense of assurance that God is in control, and that no problem is too tough for Him to handle.

- ❖ *Age before Beauty* is the second book in the Sister-to-Sister Series, following *Stuck in the Middle*, which was about the middle Sanderson sister. But there are three sisters. Will there be another book?

Absolutely! In fact, I just finished writing the first draft of *Last but Not Least*, which will hit bookstores in February of 2010. The central character is Tori, the youngest Sanderson sister, whose life is completely different than the other two. She's a professional girl, a real 'chick' with a fetish for designer clothes. There are some really funny escapades in that book, and of course more of the heartwarming family relationships that I loved in the first two. *Last but Not Least* will wrap up the Sister-to-Sister Series, and I've thrown in a couple of surprises that I think readers will enjoy.



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