

Wynne Leon (00:03)

to how to share a podcast that takes a deep dive into collaboration.

I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode Vicki Atkinson and I are with children's book author Christine Devane. a parent of young kids, reading children's books is a part of our nightly routine. On days when the news in the world seems heavy, I'm not sure whether it is my kids or me who benefit the most. Because the core messages of kindness, tolerance of others, love,

sharing and gratitude remind me of the essential parts of community and connection and soothe me.

Christine's book, Elephant Beach, is a wonderful children's book read. It is a terrific tale of patience and appreciating our differences. Christine tells us what in her childhood made her want to write this book. She also shares how it applies to her young children now. We learn how she brings this inspiring message to classrooms to enchant young audiences and what she hopes adults will take away from this beautiful book.

This is such a heartwarming episode that speaks to how we show up for each other. We know you'll love it. ~

you

Christine?

Christine Devane (01:47)
for

Wynne Leon (01:48)
Good, I'm glad to see you on this September afternoon. We're connecting from three different time zones, but it's ~ nice to all be here virtually.

Christine Devane (02:01)
I'm glad to be here. Thank you for having me.

Wynne Leon (02:04)
So, you know, we know that you are well steeped in the wellness of our kids, both as a teacher and a parent. Can you tell us how you came to write Elephant Beach and give us an elevator pitch for this beautiful book? ~

Christine Devane (02:18)
Sure. So Elephant Beach actually started when I was young. So when I was small, I loved reading books. I was very shy. I loved animals. I really wanted to become a vet, but I cannot stomach the sight of blood. So that dream had to go elsewhere. And then when I became a teenager, I started doing a lot of afterschool programs. I started babysitting. I really enjoyed working with kids because I found it to be rewarding. Also,

different and then I decided I wanted to become a teacher. I went to Merrimack College and then from there I became a teacher. And while I was teaching, I loved story time. It was my favorite time of the day because we got to connect and really discuss the topics of the book and a lot of them were social skills. And when I was teaching, I realized there weren't really a lot of books for shy children. So I wanted to write my own. So

Elephant Beach is a book about a shy young girl that goes to the beach by herself and unexpectedly bumps into some fun loving elephants who at first annoy her. And then she decides to join the group and she has a fun day at the beach with the elephants. So it shows kids that sometimes when we try something new or step out of our comfort zone, we can have fun.

Wynne Leon (03:43)
Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (03:45)
And there's so much fun on every page. Wynne and I really enjoyed the story and how it unfolds. And the visuals are so perfect because you can see, you know, she's really trying hard. She's resisting because the elephants are having the best time ever. But she's trying to hold back and keep her nose in her book. there are so many fun little things like the elephant sandwich.

When they pull her into the group and she starts participating with them, they're just some fun little nuggets that make you smile throughout.

Wynne Leon (04:21)
Right, right. You make it so clear, like, it becomes more, ~ sort of painful to be shy and resist the fun than to actually join it. Which is a great impetus to get kids going because, you know, you never know what that invitation looks like for kids. Yeah.

Christine Devane (04:44)
Yes, and it also shows kids that are extroverts that sometimes it's nice to go over and be the one to invite kids to play with you because not every child is going to come up to you. So it shows kids that sometimes if we are inviting, it's nice to ask people to join the group.

Wynne Leon (05:04)
Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (05:05)
Yeah. Well, and it's back to school season. I mean, I can't think of a better time, you know, to put this book in, you know, parents and caregivers hands to offer that encouragement. You know, if you are the more outgoing elephant, remember to look for the one who might want the, you know, the invitation to join in. And then that like Wynne said, the courage, you know, to, to take the child that might want to sit on the sidelines and kind of give them the boost that it's okay. You'll be welcome.

Wynne Leon (05:35)

That's right. Yeah. What? Did you have a reason why elephants?

Christine Devane (05:40)

Yeah, so when I was growing up, I enjoyed elephants. I thought they were funny and my parents and grandparents always brought me back elephants. I have a collection of elephants because they're supposed to bring good luck and they're also very social animals. They're very kind. They're very caring. So I thought it would be a good character for a book to show social skills to children because they are such social animals and also

Kids think they're funny because they're big.

Wynne Leon (06:11)

Yeah, that's true.

Vicki Atkinson (06:13)

Yeah, and when elephants start dancing on the beach, really you can't miss them, right?

Wynne Leon (06:19)

It's kind of a perfect body for an extrovert illustration, right? ~ So what do you think, I mean, the other messages that I took away were embracing differences and sharing space. I what do think the world would look like if we broke down those boundaries and helped kids understand?

Christine Devane (06:27)

Yeah.

Well, it also shows kids and adults to give people a chance before judging them because at first she thought the elephants were annoying because they got sand on her towel and because they were blocking the sun. They didn't mean to be annoying, but once she gave them a chance, she realized they were just having fun. So it's a message that kids and adults can have to just really be kind to each other, try to get to know each other.

not to really judge people before you know that because you might look at someone and say, ~ wow, I think they're this or I think they're that. But you don't really know until you reach out and try to talk to

Wynne Leon (07:24)

Yeah. So true. Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (07:27)

Well,

and I'm curious because your website is beautiful, by the way. It's a wonderful resource for folks to learn more about you and the book and we'll make sure to connect that. But you do such a nice job of telling the story and your own children. Do they know about your elephant collection? Do they know about mom's inspiration to write about elephants? Is that a legacy that you're threading through with your own kids?

Christine Devane (07:55)

Yes, we have lots of elephants all over my house. So my kids love the elephants. They think it's funny and they're very into the whole book thing. They think it's cute. They pick up the book and they say, this is mommy's book. And then they were just ecstatic when I went to their classes. They said, my mom's coming to school today because I went to a lot of classrooms before school.

ended in the spring. I went to a lot of classrooms and we had beach parties where they sat on towels and wore sunglasses. So my kids were very into that. And my oldest son, he's funny when I say I'm going to go somewhere, he helps me pack up my stuff. So I'll say, okay, well, let's bring this and let's bring that. And it's cute. And I'm in my daughter's room right now. And she has elephants in her room. tried to do an elephant theme for her. So yeah.

Wynne Leon (08:48)

Well, I can see a copy of the book behind you, which is perfect.

Vicki Atkinson (08:53)

Yeah,

it's like part of the decor. It belongs there.

Wynne Leon (08:56)

There couldn't be more perfect. What I love about children's books is that you get to talk to both of the audience, as you said, both kids and the adults that are often reading to them. It's so cool that you're doing beach parties and bringing in that fun element as well. What do you hope adults take away from Elephant Beach?

Christine Devane (09:19)

I just want adults to be more patient and understanding with shy kids because growing up shy, I know that it's not always easy. And sometimes people will say, ~ well, why don't you just want to join the group? Or why don't you want to do this? Or why don't you want to do that? And it's not always easy. My parents were very patient with me, but I can remember they used to take me to dance class and I didn't want to do it. And they let me sit on the side. And then one day I just...

jumped up and did it. And I love dance class, but they didn't push me. And I know sometimes people, think are almost, they feel bad if their kids are shy. Like, why isn't my kid joining the group? And why doesn't my kid want to play? So just want parents to really be patient. I mean, one of my own children is very shy. And the same thing with the dance class happened with him with soccer. I took him every week. He sat on the side and I just let him and then.

think it was the second of the last week he jumped in and played. And then the next week he said, when's soccer. And I said, it's all done. he missed all of them sitting on the side. But I think for parents to realize that every kid is different. And for some kids joining groups, it's tough. And all we can really do is encourage them. And it's not

necessarily a bad thing. I think parents think it's bad if a kid doesn't always want to join a group. It's not.

Everybody has a different personality and hopefully parents can understand that and just really be patient with their kids. My three are all extremely different. So I have to be patient and they all need different things.

Wynne Leon (10:59)

Right. And true for adults too. mean, every adult wants to dominate a conversation or jump into the fray at a party.

Mm-hmm as is patience. mean patience if we just all had more patience for each other. Yeah

Christine Devane (12:05)

Yeah, yes, I agree.

Wynne Leon (12:08)

to show up in whatever way we want to show up. Well, we are so grateful that you came to talk with us. mean, if you think about your trajectory from a shy kid to now all the classrooms you're hosting and book readings you're doing for kids and coming on podcasts, I mean, that's ~ a really fun way to show what shy kids grow into is a beautiful author.

Christine Devane (12:36)

Exactly. And it's funny because a lot of people I think would be surprised that knew me when I was younger because I really was quiet. So to all the people out there that have shy kids, eventually they can grow out of their shells.

Wynne Leon (12:52)

Well, yeah, and do beautiful work. We love your book. Thank you so much for talking with us about it.

Christine Devane (13:00)

Thank you so much for having me on.

Wynne Leon (13:04)

So good.

Thank you for listening. Our music was written for us by the incredible duo of Jack Canfora and Rob Koenig. For show notes and more great inspiration see avitiva.com