

Wynne Leon (00:03)

Welcome to How to Share, a podcast that celebrates the art of teaching, learning, giving, and growing.

I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode, I'm with author Ana Hebra Flaster. She gives us the elevator pitch for her book, *The Property of the Revolution*. It's an incredible memoir of the immigrant story with so much heart and courage. Ana tells us the story of how her family left Cuba with nothing of value as demanded by the Castro government, but they couldn't contain the spirit and grit of those that left.

Ana tells the story of how her mom stood up for an employee working for her and how that reflected the ethos of the Havana barrio from where she came. We talk about Ana's aunt's determination to take her teaching degree with her to America, even though it was forbidden by the Cuban government and her family disagreed. Ana explains why this was important enough to disregard the rules. We talk about Ana's childhood tolerance

of "Cubanosity" as she coined the term and the struggle to both be rooted in her heritage but also be free of it as she came of age. Anna tells us what writing a memoir has sparked in other immigrants and families she's talked to after publication and how the thread of one experience touches so many. Anna reminds us to find our viejos or old people and ask them questions.

Ana introduced me to the phrase, *Ponte Guapa*, make yourself brave. She exhibits that courage in writing a book that not only captures her family story, but also speaks to all of us digging deep to know where we came from and how we fit in. This is a great book and fantastic conversation. I know you'll love it.

you

Ana Hebra Flaster (02:28)

Hello, Wynn,

Wynne Leon (02:30)

It's

so nice to meet you. mean, I love being able to meet an author after I've dug into their book. So it's just such a pleasure to meet you and your book, *The Property of the Revolution* is just so rich with heart and courage and family longing and fortitude. Can you give us an elevator pitch for the book?

Ana Hebra Flaster (02:55)

Well, first, thank you for appreciating it. You know, as an author, it's it's a labor of love often. And so thank you for that elevator pitch for property of the revolution from a Cuban barrio to a New Hampshire mill town would be that it's about losing your home, your family, your culture, your country, your language.

in the span of 48 hours and rebuilding your life in a cold and foreign land. It's about the power and the beauty of the immigrant and refugee experience and especially families.

Wynne Leon (03:42)

that's such a good elevator pitch because it covers on so much of the meatiness of what you write about. then I'm thinking about as you talk about losing yourself and you bring all of your family members sort of we see them in their different ways of that rebuilding. And one of the stories I love is what your Tia.

bringing her teaching certificate in her bra and you write about that. I love the idea of my brave aunt taking a risk so she'd have what she needed to live in liberty. ~ such a powerful sentence.

Ana Hebra Flaster (04:19)

Yeah,

I am going to remind myself of that part because that's a really no one's brought that particular stuff line up.

Wynne Leon (04:28)

I think it's on page 72.

Ana Hebra Flaster (04:31)

~

Well, yeah. And it was, as you know, it was hung on the wall. It was the first thing that she, when we had enough money to buy a frame, she put it up on the wall at our first house that we rented altogether, all nine of us. And it was there, a reminder. was sort of an ~

an emblem of what powerful women can do. And she risked a lot. don't, your listeners may not know that when people were leaving Cuba, fleeing the revolution, it was very difficult to get out. There were many, many obstacles, including being persecuted for having declared yourself an enemy of the revolution, which you had to do in order to apply for that exit visa.

and you could not take anything of any value, no money. And we were working class, so we didn't have money. So no money, no materially valuable anything, including diplomas. So Tia had a doctorate in pedagogy and she had to leave with her two sons and leave her

husband behind. She wanted to teach in this country because she loved teaching, loved it. She was a teacher through and through. Just in the morning from the morning to night a natural born teacher. And she, know, from the story, you know that she and my mother got into a big fight because my mother thought she was crazy to take the risk of being arrested by having cut up her diploma and sewn it into her bra.

Wynne Leon (06:03)

through.

Ana Hebra Flaster (06:22)

her full panel bra. Remember those old fashioned bras that maybe your mother had? And that's what she did. And thank God she did because she was able to teach in New Hampshire for 30 years.

Wynne Leon (06:24)

Hehehehe yeah! Yeah!

It's such a, mean that story capsulates so much because it's, it's the risk. It's the really, it's the bareness of starting over. And it's the idea of, of who they, who she was as a teacher. And how do I take that with me to this?

Ana Hebra Flaster (06:47)

Yes.

Identity, you're right. In a way, it's about her identity. you know, again, I didn't even thought of that. That's great. Wynne, you need to talk to you more often.

Wynne Leon (07:06)

Come back anytime. love that. So another one of the stories that I love about your powerful women in your family ~ was the one of your mom where she stands up for an employee. She's a manager at CVS, right? Do I have that right? And she has an employee named Cindy who is suspected of stealing and your mom just knows. Can you tell us?

And it's just so good, her values and her fierceness. Can you tell us that story?

Ana Hebra Flaster (07:39)

Yeah, yeah. You know, it's funny because I didn't know that story until she passed away. And one of the women from the store, could imagine it was a great job for a high schooler. So, so many high school girls went through her, her school, her own little school. And so, the woman who spoke was a long time friend who had worked for her all those years ago and she told this story. So, she

And Cindy wasn't her real name. changed her name. But anyway, this young woman was accused by the agents that the CVS corporation was using at the time to just, think that this is common. go to the stores and kind of pretend that they're customers to see if anybody's stealing, not ringing up properly or ringing up and taking money. And they accused her of not

of stealing, of not ringing up something. can't remember the details of what, basically theft. And they approached my mother and she said, you're wrong. I know that girl and that girl would never steal. And they said, no, we have the proof. You know, we have the proof right here. And, and, and, she said, no, I, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to fire her. And this went on for days and the poor girl, they had talked to her.

And Mami stood by the girl and she said, don't you worry. I'm not going to let them for one minute accuse you of this. I believe you. And they wanted her to fire Cindy. And my mother said, no, you're going to have to fire me. If you fire Cindy, you're going to have to fire me because you made a mistake and go back. And she insisted and they went back and they realized that they had made a mistake.

that Cindy had not lied, had not stolen. Meanwhile, my mother was coming home and the whole family was freaking out because her job was on the line and we needed every penny.

Wynne Leon (09:46)

Yeah, and she'd worked hard to get there. mean, she-

Ana Hebra Flaster (09:49)

He had worked very hard and retail is a very hard career. mean, that's, that's a hard career. And, because so many hours and it's, usually coming out of your family time too. Right. ~ yeah. So when.

Wynne Leon (10:04)

That is the Juanelo is I'm am I saying that Juanelo

Ana Hebra Flaster (10:07)

Juanelo,

Juanelo ethos

Wynne Leon (10:10)

of standing tough with your people and protecting the old, young and vulnerable. And it comes through even when she isn't coming from a place of power really in the time or in the history.

Ana Hebra Flaster (10:28)

Yeah, yeah. It really was the best of the barrio ethos. Everybody knew everything about everybody. They would know if you were likely to have stolen something, because they knew each other so, so well. There were four generations, four generations of my family on both sides of my family that lived in that barrio. There were couples that grew up together.

and married each other. There were third generation of friendships because everybody stayed in the same house. This is something I tell readers that, know, in wealthy countries like ours in the United States, people are used to getting up and flying across the country and for study, for work, maybe they even settle 3,000 miles from home. That wasn't the case in Cuba.

then, and I believe now too, and my experience, much of Latin America is like this, where you stay close to home and caring for your elders, your viejos is an honor. And so when my family left their viejos behind, suddenly, abruptly, as you know, because we, the guard came with our exit papers as we were sitting down to eat dinner and out we went, sealed up the house, property of the revolution was on the banner.

we had 48 hours to say goodbye to everybody. my father, a few weeks before my father passed away in 2024, he brought up again that he was so regretful that he had left his Tio Juan and Tia Nana behind with no one to take care of them. And I had to walk him through the rationale one more time. They knew what you were doing was right.

They loved you. They knew you loved them. They knew you loved us and that you had to do what you were doing for us. And then it calmed down.

Wynne Leon (12:33)

Yeah, it stayed with him for all those years, right?

Ana Hebra Flaster (12:36)

Yes, yes, it's just a way of life that, you know, when you say, well, we left and we left the country. Right? No, it's not like it is here. It's not like you, you live 3000 miles away from each other. It's every day all day in your face. And that's a big hole. That's a big hole that you leave behind.

Wynne Leon (12:58)

Well, and I think you describe that so well in your writing. I mean, I think you talk about reading those letters from people. ~ The voices of their old friends rose up from the blue tissue thin papers rustling in their hands. And I'm going to probably murder these names, but Neri, Ophelia, Pancha, and the others told them about their children, the food lines, something funny that happened at the bus stop, a new birth, a new death, home.

Ana Hebra Flaster (13:27)

home.

Wynne Leon (13:29)

That longing for the home while you're trying to rebuild this, you just portray that so beautifully.

Ana Hebra Flaster (13:37)

Thank you. Thank you, Wynne. I think it's a beautiful, beautiful human tradition. It's not just a Cuban story, right? I had an Afghani reader tell me that she had to keep reminding herself that this wasn't her story. This wasn't her memoir. I had a 92-year-old man tell me that

Okay, it's about Abuela, but in the story, he kept seeing his Romanian Jewish grandmother and the 31 first cousins, his 31 first cousins who were always together. And so that's just a human story. It's probably since Adam and Eve, right? It's like you get expelled from someplace, especially if you're a refugee, you're expelled, you're fleeing.

Wynne Leon (14:13)

Yeah.

Ana Hebra Flaster (14:30)

An immigrant has a different kind of trajectory, but it could be just as dramatic. But usually they choose, they wanna go, it's a better life, I'm gonna choose. And either way, you've left an old world way of life behind. And somehow in our family, those women here and the women in Havana.

never gave up on each other. They those letters went back, you know, they wrote to each other. They supported each other, they loved each other. And they gave each other a way to save home, a way to save their home, right?

Wynne Leon (15:20)

that's so beautiful. But you write as a kid, then trying to integrate those two things. mean, one of my another great line that I love from you is, ~ this is as your perspective as a kid, I tolerated Cubanosity inside the house just fine most days. But then you still had to come up, you know, you still had to integrate yourself and your identity.

Knowing that your family was different because most, you know, most of the families around here didn't have nine people in a house and all the other and the smells of your food and all.

Ana Hebra Flaster (15:57)

And right, and the weird music and the strange language that everybody seems to shout. We're not quiet people. And so many other oddities. so I had a meet though he do a journalist and author I admire very much Cuban, Cuban American interviewed me in Miami and

She said, Cubanosity. I haven't heard of that. I loved it. She said, because it's Cuban Americans use Cubani dad, which is cute. I don't know how to get Cubanidad is. Warmer, you know, it's it's Cubaness. Cubanosity is exactly what. Yes, it's a word I created, but it's it's exactly what it felt like, which is a monstrosity.

a cultural monstrosity. And it could, I could, I could handle it in the house, but I needed to fly under the radar. Is that how you say it? Fly under the radar outside. Because I was trying to be like everybody else, just like every, you know, I wanted to be, I wanted to have freckles. I to have a sunburn. I never got a sunburn. And

Yeah, but my mother, my God, those those old fashioned Cuban musicians that she would play on the record player. Remember, they didn't, weren't able to buy that up here. And it wasn't like you could download anything then. Right. So those were treasured albums that came from family members who visited from Cuban enclaves in Miami or New Jersey. Right. And

And so they were treasured and I still remember her standing. So we cleaned every Saturday. Yeah. And it was fun because she would sometimes she would let me play my music, but just seeing her be so happy with her, with her music. We always had to have music when we were cleaning, but I her standing in front of the record player, just like soaking in the Cuban rhythm.

And I was like, my God, I hope, because that was right in front of the picture window. like, I hope not.

Wynne Leon (18:22)
Nobody can see that.

Ana Hebra Flaster (18:26)
She would, she would, I wrote in the book, I used to do this regularly, which was to lower the windows so that nobody would hear that crazy music coming out of our house.

Wynne Leon (18:37)
Right, right. Because you're a kid and you're trying to figure out that for yourself in a way that, I mean, your parents had that, strong memories, that reminiscent bumps that they talk about where the memories are so strong from 16 to 25, but you came over as a six-year-old and-

Ana Hebra Flaster (18:58)
True, the 16 to 25.

Wynne Leon (19:00)
especially with the music, the memories from there. You talk about those being really powerful.

Ana Hebra Flaster (19:07)
I didn't know that that was a range. know that, I'm sure you have this in your family. There's always somebody who one pays attention to stories and then two remembers things. Maybe that's the same person. In our family, it turned out that it was me. I mean, I do have what my cousin once said to me, my cousin's wife said,

Ana, I think you would remember what fallopian tube you came down.

Wynne Leon (19:36)
That's good.

Ana Hebra Flaster (19:37)
Maybe I would, really, I don't think I had that much memory recall, but yeah, I ~ I remember a lot. remember things that the earliest memory I think I have is when I was three and I asked my father about it one day, this memory, it's actually in the book. It's when he goes back to his friend's farm with me. I don't know if you got to that part, but anyway, it was a day that was so bizarre for me.

as a three year old that I had memories. I said, did we ever, did you ever take me to a farm that where there was a white dog running around and it was a dirt floor and somebody gave me Mamey this really

delicious fruit. That's really hard to get in, in, in fruit form, even, even Miami. And he said, you can't remember that somebody told you. And then I told them the rest of it.

And it turned out it wasn't a dog, it was a goat. It was the mother of his friend, the farmer, had given me goat's milk that day and had given me mamey, because I remember her scooping it out of the fruit. You know how you do that with kiwi? It was like that. And I hadn't seen that before either. So they were just, you know, like who would remember?

Wynne Leon (20:59)
Right.

Ana Hebra Flaster (21:06)
Some of us are just wired like that.

Wynne Leon (21:08)
Yeah. And thank goodness you are because you've written your family story and you kind of touched on this about how that helps other people think about their own resilience and their own traditions and histories and especially that immigrant story. mean, how does that feel knowing that other people are using your incredible memory, your storytelling capabilities to process their own history?

Ana Hebra Flaster (21:36)
Do you mean in my family or the people who have read the book?

Wynne Leon (21:41)
Great, great question. think I sort of, meant other people like you were talking about that Afghani reader. But I think I'd love to hear how your family feels about it too.

Ana Hebra Flaster (21:52)
answer the question that you asked, which is how it makes me feel when somebody else starts talking about, and this happens in many, many of these talks, people want to tell, especially if they're young people, my grandfather and he said, and, but my grandmother and everybody's got, I was at a university in Hampshire the other day and this kid was Cuban, the child of Cuban, Cuban.

and Syrian, a Syrian couple. had grandparents who were immigrants from Cuba and Syria. And then he had a great grandfather who was a Holocaust survivor who he had actually met and had told him stories. So I love that the book does that. And I always tell, always end my talks with talk to your viejos, find your old people and ask them some questions.

Put the phone down. My mother used to call them distractors. Put your distractors down and go find yourself an old person. As far as my family goes, so my sister was born here, but my brother and my two cousins were the ones who were experienced this whole thing. And we were older. My sister's eight years younger than I am. And the boys did not

want to face this stuff again. They didn't want to know they didn't want to feel sad. They didn't want to see the pain that the viejos went through. And I offered them the manuscript multiple times in its many forms. Nobody could get through it. Nobody could because of the emotion. So my brother would say I can't I fall apart at the end of chapter one.

then I think I can do chapter two and I fall apart at the end, you know, halfway through chapter two. And then don't, you know, it's deep crying because I've done it. I know what, what that kind of crying is.

You're crying for someone else, right? you're really crying for someone else and it's an emotional read for them. So I had forced them to face a trauma that they one, like me.

didn't think it was a trauma. Remember we were told we're superheroes. We won, we beat Castro. We're, look at us go. ~ And then it turned out years later. Wow. That wasn't the full story. So now they have to face that I'm very proud of my brother because he finished the book, but as he was reading it, he would text me, you're kicking my ass today. You're kicking my ass today.

It's like a scab and you're picking at it. I know that it's

taken me years and I think it's I'm better for it. I am a fuller version of myself because I have looked at this pain, but not everybody's the same. A lot of people are surface swimmers and then some of us are bottom dwellers and then we pull the surface swimmers down and ruin their day.

Wynne Leon (25:05)

Yeah. Well, I think, you know, there's a phrase that you talk about in the book. I hope I say it right. Ponte Guapa. Make yourself brave ~ And, you you write so beautifully. You dig into those layers so beautifully. I think, you know, I'm a big fan of writing for wellness. I think you've done a huge service by writing these stories down. ~ thank you. Talking to the Viejos and

getting the stories and putting it onto paper so that you have the answers there when you're ready.

Ana Hebra Flaster (25:42)

Yeah, that's what I, I think Trauma is a bitch.

Wynne Leon (25:47)

It is. is. And we just hope that we could paper it over and go away and it doesn't work that way.

Ana Hebra Flaster (25:50)

Yeah.

No, no, doesn't work like that. But it sure can make you stronger. And it just sharpens your view of especially people, how people are, hopefully the best of people. In my case, in this book, it's the best. These were such good people. They were so decent. They were so brave and so loving that the pain

makes them even more.

Wynne Leon (26:27)

that. You just see them as in their fullness.

Ana Hebra Flaster (26:33)

in their fullness.

Wynne Leon (26:34)

their fullness. Well, Ana thank you so much for the time talking about your incredible book, Property of the Revolution. It's just warm and full of so much history and courage and it's a great read.

Ana Hebra Flaster (26:51)

thank you, Wynne Thank you so much for your support, for your appreciation. It's just so rewarding. It's so gratifying. So thank you. And thank you for inviting me to come talk with you. I love what you're doing. ~

Wynne Leon (27:08)

Thank you.

Ana Hebra Flaster (27:10)

It's

very moving, very moving stuff. thanks.

Wynne Leon (27:14)

Thank you.

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