

Wynne Leon (00:02)

Welcome to How to Share, a podcast that celebrates how we inspire others by sharing our stories.

I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode, my co-host Vicki Atkinson and I are with author and educator Gloria Golec. We talk with acclaimed author and educator Gloria about her heartwarming new release, South Side Memories. This captivating book invites you on a journey through vivid snapshots of family, Polish immigrant heritage and the vibrant streets of Chicago.

With every page, Gloria masterfully reveals how cherished memories shaped her life and inspired her path. We uncover the power of storytelling as Gloria shares how writing helped her stay connected to her roots and loved ones. She generously reveals the secrets to starting and finishing a personal project that might seem daunting at first, making it a

accessible for anyone ready to share their own story. Southside Memories isn't just a memoir. It's a celebration of identity and resilience. Through glorious, uplifting narrative, you'll learn how sharing your story can touch hearts and inspire others. This is a must-listen for anyone who values heritage, family, and the transformative magic of storytelling. Don't miss your chance to be inspired.

Fall in love with South Side Memories today.

you

you

Vicki Atkinson (02:01)

Gloria?

Gloria Golec (02:02)

Hi!

Wynne Leon (02:03)

Vicki and I are so excited to talk to you because we enjoyed your book, South Side Memories, immensely. Can you give us an elevator pitch for the book?

Gloria Golec (02:13)

Sure. Well, I think it's the story of the American dream and immigrants come to the United States and they can't really, they don't expect that much for themselves, but they really hope that their grandchildren will really succeed, really just top. And it's a story of hard work. And if you work hard,

you can succeed, can get what you want. It's a book about family and church, which together gives a very strong sense of place. And the strong sense of place leads to a very intense sense of belonging, which I was very fortunate to have. So.

I think it's a very personal story, but it has so many universalities in it. So I feel very grateful to have had the experiences that I've had. And it's been a real joy to share it with other people.

Wynne Leon (03:27)

Well, and we were talking before we hit record about how when you share your family like that, it becomes something that universally people can relate to.

Gloria Golec (03:38)

Well, and I get to think about it all over again and I get to think about it in a different way. I'm looking at it on paper and it's funny, it should be the same as what it is in my head, but actually more intense on paper.

Wynne Leon (03:53)

Right? Well, and when you went reading through it, looked like it felt like looking through a photo album, which you kind of really make that feeling of flipping through memories palpable. How did you decide on that format and what memories to share?

Gloria Golec (04:11)

love when you said that because I thought, yes, that's a perfect analogy for this. And the genesis of the book came because one day I decided, this was a very long time ago, that I wanted to write an essay about my grandmother. I wanted to write this homage to her, everything that she had done for me, the hands of Sotogen, 1955. And so I wrote this essay about my grandmother and I really liked it. But as I was writing it, I thought,

Well, what about my Aunt Bernice? Look at all she did. I thought, I'm going to write one about my niece. So I'm writing about my Aunt Bernice and I thought, gee, I'm kind of missing the elephant in the room, my parents. What about them? And so that's kind of how it got started. And so it's not chronological order. It doesn't have the narrative arc because I really wanted character sketches. I wanted something different.

so I could focus on a person without taking pieces of that chronology, which well, so that's how it got started. It got started. I wanted to write an essay about my grandmother. And then I kept thinking of all the other people in my life who shaped me. So how could I stop with just her?

Vicki Atkinson (05:31)

I

think that's what we appreciate about it because it felt very almost as if we were with you as you were writing and it felt like the flow was coming from your heart. And I think you're doing a great service Gloria to other folks, you know, that I know of that are curious about writing for wellness, saving family stories for posterity. is so overwhelming the contemplation of doing this. And I think what you just said, just begin.

Just begin and then kind of follow your heart and all the people that need to be written about, they'll arrive. They'll get their time, but just begin.

Gloria Golec (06:08)

Anne Lamotte

has that great book, Bird by Bird. ~ Write one bird story. And then ask yourself if you want to write another one. And I can almost guarantee you, you're going to want to keep writing more. You're going to get so many more ideas as you're writing the stories. We all have a story to tell.

Vicki Atkinson (06:11)

So good, yeah.

Gloria Golec (06:31)

We all have a story to tell. And I think it's so important that we write them down. As I wrote this book, my father's sister, my Aunt Bernice, who was like a second mother to me, well, we called her the chatterbox. And we used to talk quite a bit. But do you know that she was the one who told me all the stories about growing up with my dad? She was the one who told me. My dad, he...

never talked about any of it's over. just, and so I'm so grateful that my Aunt Bernice talked about all of these things to me. I wouldn't know any of this. We need to write our story. We need to tell our stories.

Vicki Atkinson (07:14)

Yo!

Well, you do such a great job. think one of the things that Wynne and I enjoyed the most was just the, as you said, it's the place and the time and the gender roles, how hard everyone worked, but how hard the women in your family worked to do all the things, literally all the things. And then like your mother also working outside of the home, you know, out of necessity. So you counterpoint that with like the stoicism.

you know, of men at that time. And I think a lot of readers will identify with what you've written about your dad being, you know, distant. You know, he wasn't the storyteller. You didn't know what he was thinking. But yes, thank God for Aunt Bernice, right?

Gloria Golec (08:03)

Right. Well, and to go back to the women, for a very long time, until like a month ago, I resented my mother for making me come home and put in light the gas stove, put the food in the oven. And actually, as I was, as I was thinking about this book, I thought about my mother and

At first I thought, well, okay, she didn't have a crock pot. She didn't, and we never ate out. And so what were her choices? But I thought about it a little more carefully as I have done with almost everything in this book, because now I'm reading it. I'm reading it. And my mother was, she was 4'11", she was tiny. She was like a little pit bull. I think she could have eaten bread and water for like,

a year and nothing would have happened to her. But my father, my father was not physically as strong as my mother and he had a very demanding job in a factory standing for eight or 10 hours a day. Now, what I've learned in reading my own book is that I think my mother was so worried about my father, sick, he had to have a really solid, heavy dinner when he came, he was exhausted.

And I think that because they had all seen people starve, they had all seen people lose their homes. think that's when my mother went. Went to that catastrophic end. That if my father doesn't have a good dinner, he's going to get sick. He's going to lose his job. We're going to lose our home. And so I was able to forgive my mother for putting this. And I'll never know.

her exact thoughts, but I think I've come to understand a lot of things that I didn't feel I understood as much before I wrote the book.

Vicki Atkinson (10:06)

Right, clarity through expression, right? ~

Wynne Leon (10:10)

Well,

and you kind of come to that conclusion, you write about that, you say, ~ there are so many things she did wrong, but there were so many things she did right, because in the end, she just kept hoping and doing.

Gloria Golec (10:25)

Well, and it was just like you said a few minutes ago, she had to do everything. She was the one. She was in charge of, she was the, you know, leader of the orchestra here. She had to juggle all these different sides. I don't know how, I don't know how she did what she did when I looked back. If you're doing 300 things, are all 300 gonna come out correctly or well? No, because you're doing so many things.

So that's how I see my mother. She had so much on her plate. And I was very competent. I was a very competent person. So here you are. You're stuck with this family to feed and you have to go to work. And what's the solution? a competent daughter. Right.

Wynne Leon (11:10)

Right. Well, your memories and the warmth of them comes shining through in your writing. Your grandmother, your Aunt Bernice, your father retyping your paper. They come through like a big hug. Did writing those keep those close for you?

Gloria Golec (11:29)

made them closer. Made them even more intense for me. I cried for some of this. And I appreciated them so much more from the point of view of a much older person because everything these people did for me, they did it out of sacrifice. Bernice worked at Western Electric on the assembly line. And she used to take me to the opera.

I remember we went to the opera, we sat on the third floor and we went to Kungsholm and we went to the Prudential on the top of the rock. Now this is aunt doing all this on her salary from Western Electric. So this is a big sacrifice that she's making, but they all did everything out of sacrifice because there was nothing extra. There was nothing. It was a choice. It was a choice.

this for Gloria, I'm going to give this to Gloria. And in the moment, you're like, wow, you know, going here, I'm getting this, gee, that's great. But then later you think, wow, this, this was a big, a big decision. Yeah. Because everything was a big decision. Right.

Vicki Atkinson (12:43)

And you write about just what you were describing just now about the going places within Chicago and as a young girl, how you had to master the train, the L, the bus, make all those connections to get to those places because it wasn't just getting to these beautiful venues and kind of your cultural heart, I think, was being tended to as well.

But you did such a great job of describing just the hardship of just getting around sometimes was not easy. Not everyone had a car.

Gloria Golec (13:19)

No, not everyone had a car. And when we finally did get a car, my father had to take it to work. Well, my mother didn't drive for quite a while. ~ But I'll tell you, my memories of Chicago bus drivers, were the greatest. They were the greatest guys. I had to sit in the front seat and they would talk to me. They knew exactly where I was going. They knew.

My mother would always tell them she has to get off at such and such a place. But I mean, they were familiar with the place. And they were taking care of me. I never felt scared. I never felt worried. And of course, my grandmother's phone number, LA 38033. Anything happens, you call my grandmother. You call grandma. You have a car. But she would fix it.

Vicki Atkinson (14:05)

You

Wynne Leon (14:14)

Right. And you write about your relationship with your grandmother. You said, I could do no wrong. Every child should know what this feels like before he or she grows up, no matter what my grandmother was on my side.

Gloria Golec (14:29)

~ I'll tell you, it was magic. That was just absolutely magical to have somebody dote on me in that way. And also, I mean, she included me in all of her, when I look back, I think, how did she manage all this? She included me in all of the daily tasks that she had to do. And we all know it's easier to do it by yourself. ~

And she would bake, she would ask me to help her roll out the dough, or I would put the clothes through the ringer washer and the washing machine. And of course, when the coal man came, we didn't know about carcinogens, he would dump it through a window on the outside in the basement in a chute, and then I would get to play in coal. ~

Vicki Atkinson (15:17)

Nobody knew!

Gloria Golec (15:19)

But my grandmother included me in her life. Like on a minute to minute basis.

Vicki Atkinson (15:27)

And if that was intense time with her that I think, I mean, she demonstrated that you had such value, you know, as a little girl, the fact that she would give you so much of that time, like you said, rather than just do it, you know, herself, you were right there. But yeah, what it is like a hug when we read it.

Wynne Leon (15:49)

Yeah, yeah.

Gloria Golec (15:50)

Then as

I got older and we would be at weddings, there's that one part in my book about how we were at this wedding and they had champagne coming from the fountain. So I had never had champagne. Well, anyway, so my grandmother and I walked over to the fountain and she started to tell me about how it was the wedding. I mean, this wedding was very elaborate. She said.

Vicki Atkinson (16:01)

Yes

You

were little. I mean, you were, you were still a young girl at this point. Yeah.

Gloria Golec (16:21)

nine or 10.

But my grandmother, she had a preface it with, well, he's a rich dentist and you're going to be rich too someday. That was always, that was that word, you're going to be rich. But she took the champagne glass and she filled it with from the fountain and she gave one to me and then she took one herself. my mother came over and she was scolding my grandmother.

Grandmother didn't think it was a big deal. And I mean, there are two ways to look at this. Why is my grandmother giving this child champagne? But in some ways, I was her peer.

Vicki Atkinson (16:58)

mean, yeah.

Gloria Golec (17:00)

So did I me, but I was her friend.

Vicki Atkinson (17:02)

I think there are cultural differences about wine at the table depending upon family and background. think about some of my Italian family. It wasn't this huge mortal sin to give a child a sip of this or that. Plus your grandma was making a point. She was saying, dream big, Gloria. That's what I got from that. It wasn't about the champagne.

Gloria Golec (17:26)

She always said that to me. But it was like two girlfriends, you know, standing around at a bar. I think that's kind of what it was for her.

Wynne Leon (17:34)

Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (17:35)

Yeah.

Yeah, right. good. And I have to ask, when you were talking about your mom and your grandma, was joking with you before we recorded. There's a beautiful thread in your book about making baked potatoes. And I made some yesterday, and I was thinking about you. But one of the questions I wanted to ask you, and I don't remember, who was it, your mom or grandma who had the red tin recipe box? Whose was that?

Wynne Leon (17:40)

All right.

Gloria Golec (18:05)

I have. ~

Vicki Atkinson (18:06)

Your

mother's, ~ do you really? My grandma had one of those and I don't know where it ended up. But when I read that, I got shivers all over. And then you mentioned making the lamb cake for Easter. That was like such a thing, right? And the molds and all of that. So there's a lot of just richness, I think about food and family in your story.

Gloria Golec (18:31)

Well, and I love that we have, so when my mother passed away, I found the red tin box, which of course I wanted, but I love looking at her recipes in her handwriting. With the lards on them, grease, then maybe little bits, whatever. It's such a treasure. It's just such ~ a My mother was doing all this after she came home from work in the factory. I mean, I look at some of these recipes and I think, ~ gee, I'm too tired to do this.

Wynne Leon (19:01)

Right?

Vicki Atkinson (19:02)

Yeah, and not just making dinner. mean, you write in the book about, you know, was making the bread and the rolls and the desserts. And it wasn't, you baking something, you know, every day? It's what, you know, are you baking it? And yeah, it's a very different time. But I think although you're writing about your Polish family, I think the stories that you tell, so many of us will identify, you know, regardless of our ancestry. just, was a, women worked really hard. Let's just say that.

Wynne Leon (19:30)

Yeah. Well, and it's so easy in the book to see your trajectory to becoming an educator, ~ your Polish roots, your first grade teacher, and maybe even a little bit of the kissing in the cloakroom. All great waypoints. How do you think this book teaches other people to share their memories and their family and their roots?

Gloria Golec (19:54)

Well, I think that ~ it illuminates pivotal points in your life. forces you to think about what did happen in your life. When I look back on my first grade teacher, I remember my mother telling my father, I think she's 20 years old, ~ which at the time seemed pretty old to me.

came to school on date, I think it was day two. And I told her I read the book Dick and Jane the previous night. And she said, well, you don't know how to read. I remember I said, and I was a very quiet kid, but I sat down and I must have been glaring at her all day because she called me up and she said, well, if you can read, then show me. Now we had like 50 kids in the room. So I read her the whole book and she's, and I mean, I still remember her face. I still remember being in the front of that room.

And she said, well, you're going to be my helper. I'll never forget that. I will never forget that day. They're going to be my helper. She let me sit in the front of the room. I could sit at her desk. And I loved it. I loved being out there, being in charge. ~ I always think that was it. That was it. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (21:06)

~ Well, and you write about that. mean, first of all, I wasn't punished for being smarter. And it was one of those seemingly insignificant moments that became momentous. Looking back what she lacked in experience, she made up for in kindness. And I have always felt that this was a pivotal moment in my life that led to my lifelong career as an educator.

Gloria Golec (21:31)

Writing your own stories you begin to see those with more clarity. Who shaped you and how they shaped you and ~ to appreciate what were there for you that maybe you didn't even realize.

Vicki Atkinson (21:47)

And I think that gratitude comes through so much when you wrote about the sewing lessons, the piano lessons, and looking back and realizing there wasn't a lot for your family to play around with money-wise. The idea of extra money that doesn't exist. But I think that perspective of looking back, even though I think you understood at the time that the sewing lessons, because you excelled.

You know, I love the story that you tell about doing such a good job with your project that the teacher, Rita, right? Kept, yeah. You know, kept complimenting you, but you know, in a somewhat stoic German way, not a lot, but you know, you knew you were doing a good job. And all of a sudden your mom and aunt wanted to take sewing lessons, but you're, fixing their projects because I just, laughed out loud, you know?

Gloria Golec (22:42)

Yeah. ~

Vicki Atkinson (22:47)

Yeah, but that and the piano lessons and finding out later on that that was a big stretch financially. The piano was bought on installments and yeah.

Gloria Golec (22:59)

I didn't know if the lessons were a Polish thing, because it just seemed like if you could learn something, my parents were willing to pay for it.

Wynne Leon (23:10)

Well, it's the American dream as you pointed out. They're supporting you in building up your...

talents.

Gloria Golec (23:20)

that my mother, she asked me many times, wouldn't you like to take singing lessons? And I was never interested. ~ so now as an adult, I think, why didn't I take singing lessons? That would have been great. so even though, even, even though she would agree to the lessons that I want to take, she was on her own thinking what other lessons can't.

What other, how else can I make her better? Make her more talented.

Vicki Atkinson (23:52)

Yeah, but seeing your potential, just like your grandmother, right? And nurturing that. And clearly, like Wynne said, all those experiences led to you being, I'm sure, super impactful for the students and colleagues that in your career that you had positive impact on. readers of your book, yes.

Wynne Leon (24:15)

you

Gloria Golec (24:16)

Thank you. is just, that is just, that means so much to me. Thank you.

Vicki Atkinson (24:22)

Wow, was a pleasure to read truly. We're excited for you and we feel like we know you.

Wynne Leon (24:29)

Yeah, we really do. you did such a great job of sharing your photo album with us and bringing those memories to life, ~ letting us see them from that perspective. And it's fun to hear about how that process played out for you as you wrote them.

Gloria Golec (24:50)

Well, and I think that anybody who's thinking about doing this should ~ just think about doing it piece by piece. What's one story I want to tell? And then after you write that story, then gee, maybe there's another story because that's really how I did this. Think about writing a book. It's pretty scary. It's pretty overwhelming. But I didn't do it that way. I didn't have to scare myself.

Vicki Atkinson (25:18)

Yeah.

~

Wynne Leon (25:19)

Good way to put it. It's a way. Well, thank you so much for coming on and talking to us about your great book, South Side Memories. We just enjoyed this conversation so much.

Gloria Golec (25:30)

Thank you for having me. I really appreciate

Vicki Atkinson (25:33)

Pleasure, all the best and great success.

Gloria Golec (25:36)

Thank you. Thank you to Eckhartz Press.

Wynne Leon (25:38)

and

Vicki Atkinson (25:39)

Absolutely.

Wynne Leon (25:46)

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