

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #57
“For food critic Nancy Leson, deadlines got in the way of a good time”
Sno-Isle Libraries, April 27, 2020



Speaker 1:	00:00:09	Welcome to season three, episode 57 of Check It Out, the Sno-Isle Libraries Podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 2:	00:00:18	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle libraries.
Paul Pitkin:	00:00:26	Hello and welcome to the Check It Out Podcast. My name is Paul Pitkin. I'm the executive director of the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation. And today I am joined by my co-host Justine Easley. Hello Justine.
Justine Easley:	00:00:40	Hello.
Paul Pitkin:	00:00:40	Justine is a marketing specialist here at Sno-Isle. I'm also joined by Kurt Batdorf.
Kurt Batdorf:	00:00:46	Hello.
Paul Pitkin:	00:00:47	He is a communication specialist also at Sno-Isle. So we are going to have a wonderful discussion today. You're going to learn how to cook. No, I'm just kidding. We are going to introduce and talk to a wonderful person who I'm so thrilled to be here. Nancy Leson is here. She's a food writer, cooking instructor and public speaker. She was the restaurant critic and columnist for the Seattle Times, and has written for Bon Appetit, Town and Country and many other publications.
Paul Pitkin:	00:01:16	As you can probably tell, she hates to write and no, I'm not kidding. For the past 13 years, she's co-hosted Food For Thought with Dick Stein on NPR member station KNKX, she teaches cooking at schools throughout the Seattle area and also volunteers at our local Edmonds Elementary School.
Nancy Leson:	00:01:33	That is all true, but I want to ask, who came up with the Check It Out name for this podcast because they deserve to be paid extra.

(Continued)

Paul Pitkin: 00:01:41 I believe that was Ken Harvey, he's usually here to host and he's not here today.

Nancy Leson: 00:01:45 I love that.

Paul Pitkin: 00:01:46 But I will give him credit for that.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:01:47 He's our boss.

Paul Pitkin: 00:01:49 He's good at that stuff.

Nancy Leson: 00:01:51 Well, you guys can give him a raise or something.

Paul Pitkin: 00:01:52 We'll do that. Absolutely. I also want to disclose that Nancy and I have worked together before. She hosted Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation event down in Edmonds and I can attest to her abilities as a public speaker. She was wonderful and she took us through, you remember what you talked about? You went through your old cookbooks.

Nancy Leson: 00:02:11 No, that's not what I did. I'm pretty sure that what I did was I went through my old children's books and talk to you about the different types of chapters or moments in all of the favorite books of my childhood and youth that had to do with food. Because when I was asked to speak at the library event, I thought, what am I going to talk about? So several days before I thought, it just dawned on me, I should talk about my love for libraries and children's books and my collection of them.

Nancy Leson: 00:02:44 And in fact, I brought just a couple of those here today because there's a couple of things that really fascinate me about libraries in general and why I have always loved libraries is that my first ways of reading, we didn't have a lot of money, I didn't own a lot of books and we used to get weekly reader stuff in elementary school and I started going to the library. And what I remember most was that moment when you could go from the children's part of the library to the adults. I don't think they have that anymore. Do they? If you're a kid, can you go into the adults department?

Paul Pitkin: 00:03:20 I think so, yeah.

Nancy Leson: 00:03:21 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Justine Easley: 00:03:21 But they're pretty free flowing, we have a couple of kid areas set aside, but they flow.

Nancy Leson: 00:03:28 I think when I was a child in the Philadelphia public library system, it wasn't like that and that there was that moment, I think you had to be 12 or something to be able to go into the adults without an adult, I think that's what it was.

Paul Pitkin: 00:03:39 Is it like a separate room?

Nancy Leson: 00:03:40 Yeah.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:03:41 Wow, I don't think any of our library stands out.

Paul Pitkin: 00:03:43 No, we don't have it here.

Justine Easley: 00:03:44 They card you at the door?

Paul Pitkin: 00:03:46 Yeah, exactly.

Nancy Leson: 00:03:46 They do. And there's that stern librarian standing there. But also I remember the children's librarian from my elementary school when I was in second grade. There was this book that I have in my hand, it's called Cheerful by Palmer Brown. And what was so cool about this book, I loved it, was the story of a little church mouse and a city mouse and how they were related and how one of them sneaked into an Easter egg and ended up being taken to the country and seeing the country for the first time.

Nancy Leson: 00:04:19 And I have long collected books, both children books and cookbooks, and we'll get to that in a minute I guess. But I couldn't find this book. This book didn't exist for me and I was always finding my favorite books from my childhood and buying them. I've got a couple here. Here's one called All-of-a-Kind Family that I adored, that I read as a child. It was about a Jewish family growing up in New York at the turn of the last century, in a similar fashion to the way my grandparents grew up.

Nancy Leson: 00:04:48 And it was such a terrific book, you can see here, this has a line through it. It says Sno-Isle Libraries and it came from my favorite book sale, the Edmonds Library Book Sale that they had every year.

Paul Pitkin: 00:04:58 Yeah, they sell every year.

Nancy Leson: 00:04:59 And then I just recently purchased a gorgeous hardcover version of the same book that I got at the Antiquarian Book Sale in October every year in Seattle. I haven't been there for years, it was really terrific. But the Cheerful, the one that I couldn't find

for years and years, I remember when this new thing called the internet came out.

Paul Pitkin: 00:05:19 What's that? Is that that series of tubes?

Nancy Leson: 00:05:22 Yeah. And I found it, so now I own it from my very own self.

Paul Pitkin: 00:05:27 I actually, this is related to your love of reading and libraries, this is how it got started. I heard there was an incident that occurred in Anchorage, Alaska that might be related to this.

Nancy Leson: 00:05:39 Well, it's related to my love for books and learning and it went like this. So I lived in Anchorage, Alaska through much of my 20s. And when I first moved there, I started going to nursing school briefly. I did that for about a year and a half and I was home alone one night in this little apartment complex, I think there were eight apartments. And it was one of those horrible dead of winter, ice cold, snow everywhere Alaska nights that you have in your mind perhaps.

Nancy Leson: 00:06:09 And a knock came on the door, and I answered the door and there was a man there in a trench coat and a hat and he had a briefcase. And instead of being scared, which I should have, I said, "Are you the encyclopedia salesman?" And the guy looks at me like his jaw is on his chest. And he says, "Yes. How do you know that?" And I said, "Well, several weeks ago I sent in a postcard because I always wanted to own a set of encyclopedias." So pre-internet, you remember, you'd have to go to the library if you need to know anything. And if you were wealthy enough, maybe you had like a world book set of encyclopedias in your home, which we did not.

Nancy Leson: 00:06:54 And I always wanted a set of encyclopedia Britannica and damned if that night did I not buy, a poor nursing student in my 20s in Anchorage, Alaska, a set of encyclopedia Britannica, gorgeous leather set that this man came into my house and did nothing more than sell me a set of encyclopedias. I was a very brave young woman.

Paul Pitkin: 00:07:17 Yeah. As you were talking about that I was remembering a movie. It was a bad movie, but it was a movie that was about when it got dark and snowy during the Alaska long night, vampires came out.

Nancy Leson: 00:07:28 Yes. He did not turn into a vampire or a werewolf or any of the above.

Paul Pitkin: 00:07:32 And we're ahead of people for it.

Nancy Leson: 00:07:33 But he did say to me, I just need to tell you that I have been working on this route for 25 years and I have never ever knocked on someone's door and had them say, are you the encyclopedia sales?

Paul Pitkin: 00:07:45 Do you still have those?

Nancy Leson: 00:07:46 I do. I'm so glad you asked. And I remember tweeting a photograph of them several years ago when the news came out that they were going to stop printing, publishing the encyclopedia Britannica.

Paul Pitkin: 00:07:56 Wow. You've got this one is precious.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:07:58 [inaudible 00:07:58] precious.

Nancy Leson: 00:07:59 It is. Now ask me when the last time I opened it was.

Paul Pitkin: 00:08:03 Well, I just want to start things off. I want you to maybe talk about how you got into this food writing, food commenting career, and I'll give away the punchline. I know you waited tables first.

Nancy Leson: 00:08:14 That is true. So when you think about when you're a kid, what do you want to be when you grow up?

Paul Pitkin: 00:08:18 Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Nancy Leson: 00:08:19 The first thing I ever thought was I wanted to be a librarian, a children's library. And then I realized I really wanted to be a writer, but instead I became a waitress. I went to nursing school and withdrew. I went to college twice and withdrew actually and continued to wait tables. I had a great job. I worked all over the US and the East coast and the West and up in Alaska and here in the Seattle area for the first five years that I moved here. But I did decide finally that I wanted to actually be a writer.

Nancy Leson: 00:08:48 So I took whatever college credits I had and I took them first to Shoreline Community College where I quickly got my AA. And back then if you had a good enough GPA and it wasn't very particularly high one, you could get-

Paul Pitkin: 00:09:05 Sure.

Nancy Leson: 00:09:06 No, it was. It was like 2.5 or something like that. There was an automatic transfer into the university of Washington. Those were the days, right?

Justine Easley: 00:09:14 Just the entry, yeah.

Paul Pitkin: 00:09:17 Producer Zack is-

Nancy Leson: 00:09:19 He stand out to me.

Paul Pitkin: 00:09:21 Stands out, proud Husky over here.

Nancy Leson: 00:09:24 So I was trying to decide what should I study. I wanted to study English, but then what do you do with that, right? So I thought instead I'd studied journalism and I graduated in I think 1992. I was in my very early 30s. I worked my way through school. In fact, I remember at the university of Washington they have, and I had and I believe still have an 18 credit course called News Lab. And your job was to write for the local newspapers. Back then there were a lot more of them, the neighborhood newspapers, so we still have them. And you would write for free and in exchange you would get clips. And they also wanted me to go down to Olympia and work at the State Capitol and learn. And I had no interest in that at all.

Nancy Leson: 00:10:09 I knew I wanted to be a features writer of some sort. And the woman who was teaching the course told me, "Nancy, if you don't do that, you're never going to get a job." She also told me-

Paul Pitkin: 00:10:20 Was this true?

Kurt Batdorf: 00:10:21 Well, I went to a different college, even more liberal.

Nancy Leson: 00:10:26 Where'd you go?

Kurt Batdorf: 00:10:26 I went to Evergreen.

Nancy Leson: 00:10:27 Much more liberal.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:10:28 No journalism program at all. We just had a school paper and I became the production manager back when we had to lay it out with wax and X-ACTO knives and border tape or clip board.

Nancy Leson: 00:10:41 What's that?

Kurt Batdorf: 00:10:42 All these things that you youngsters will never know about.

Nancy Leson: 00:10:46 Yeah. So I got that degree and I was so broke by the end of it because I was waiting tables at Saleh Al Lago, an Italian restaurant at GreenLake that's now called Nels. And Nels has been there 20 years already and Saleh had been there for 17 years. So I worked there for the last five years of my career and I knew every single one of the editors and publishers in town because they used to all eat in there. And even Frank Blethen, my eventual boss at the Seattle Times was it. And I said, one day I'm going to work for you and I wasn't lying.

Paul Pitkin: 00:11:23 So that's how you got started doing the food-

Nancy Leson: 00:11:25 No, I started to do with the food bit, because a year after I graduated when I was so broke that all he did was work to make up some money and relax, I saw that there was an ad in Seattle Weekly in the back page of the paper, in the employment and they were looking for an unpaid intern in the food department.

Nancy Leson: 00:11:46 They said send a cover letter and a resume, don't call or we won't hire you, something like that. So I sent the letter, which I wish I had with me. I've often talked about that letter. I still have, it was pretty funny. And I told them, I actually lied a little. I said, my mother always wanted me to be a doctor. Maybe now at least I can tell her I'm an intern, hire me, I'm your girl. And they did. And that was the first and last job I looked for. I ended up getting paid \$5 an hour. It was an unpaid internship, but they paid me five bucks an hour for a column called As The Tables Turn. It was a gossip columnish about the Seattle restaurant scene.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:12:32 You were using your waitressing experience as your own fodder.

Nancy Leson: 00:12:36 Correct.

Paul Pitkin: 00:12:40 I wanted you to explain because you're not shy about the fact that you don't like to write or actually that you hate writing.

Nancy Leson: 00:12:45 That is true. My sister would say, "We don't use that word."

Paul Pitkin: 00:12:49 Sounds like you mean it. So how have you written so much material while hating to write and why do you hate to write?

Nancy Leson: 00:12:56 Well, writing is painful. I loved reporting, I loved going out, I loved interviewing people and finding out things. I was the person who would sit down and write and could not do what they call, you'll excuse me, the vomit draft where you just throw

it on out there and then you fix it later. I couldn't, until I got the lead on any story I was writing, I couldn't go on and I fussed with it and fussed with it until I got it right.

Nancy Leson: 00:13:25 So it took me a long time to write. And as a result of that, I like to think that much of my work did not need much editing. And I was told that all along, but it was good for my editors but not so good for me. So writing is difficult. It comes hard and less in particular when I'm writing about, you want to be correct, when I'm writing about people and their lives and their work. When I was a restaurant critic, you're taking people's livelihood into your hands and that's really an important thing. You don't want to get things wrong, you don't want to come off as cruel or overly nice. You just want to get that nice balance.

Nancy Leson: 00:14:06 So I continued, I worked for the Weekly for some time and eventually went to Sasquatch Books, which at that point was owned by the same umbrella that Seattle Weekly was originally owned by. And Sasquatch, I was the editor of the Best Places Series, for time I was the restaurant critic at Seattle Weekly. And then the PI was looking for a critic and they considered me and used me for about seven, eight months until they hired someone as a freelancer and hired someone else instead of me, kept me on as a freelancer. And then the Seattle Times called and said, "Hey, could you come talk to us?" So guess who won in that end, and the PI no longer exist in the style to which we were so well accustomed.

Paul Pitkin: 00:14:55 Well, that's just interesting because you hear people talk about writing, it's either one of the other. They'll say, it's just a magical experience.

Nancy Leson: 00:15:04 I know, I hate those people.

Paul Pitkin: 00:15:06 I just hold myself up in a little room, under no light and I don't talk to people for six months and it's just transformative. And then there's other people who are miserable and have to get drunk before they start doing it.

Nancy Leson: 00:15:17 Something like that. And also was hard for me through much of the work that I was doing at the Seattle Times, which was deadline driven. And again, it's real fun to write something if you have all the time in the world. And I always liken journalism and deadline writing to when you're in high school or college and you have a paper due and you're writing the paper or you have a final and you're studying and studying and then you write the paper and you get done or you finish the final and you're like, thank God that's over.

Nancy Leson: 00:15:45 And then you wake up the next day, you go, I got to do it again. So for me that's what it was like for a long time. I had a young child, my husband was traveling overseas and out of the state often, and we have no relations here. So I was running a household, had a young child and was working a full time and then some job. Lots of people do that, but it was hard for me. So the writing part was difficult.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:16:10 I can attest to that.

Paul Pitkin: 00:16:14 Yeah. You've been doing radio for quite some time. When you're talking to Dickstein, is that a little bit more, I don't know, relaxing, a little bit easier?

Nancy Leson: 00:16:24 Well, that all began interestingly. I was asked to write for what was then KPLU, KNKX now, to write a little essays they wanted me to read. They wanted me to do it every week. Do you ever hear those NPR essays where somebody says something really cool in about three and a half minutes and all of that would be so great. But that was at that worst time of my working mother life. And I thought, there's just no way I could do any extra work. But I said, I could do it once a month.

Nancy Leson: 00:16:53 So they agreed to that and I did it once a month for six months, and that was fun. But then they're like, please we really want you to do this every week. And they had I think two other commentators at the time. They had a financial commentator [inaudible 00:17:07], who's still doing it as a sports commentator. And I said, "Well, what are those other people do?" They come in and then somebody interviews them and they just answer questions, like I'm doing right now by the way. You can see my hair's on fire because I'm talking.

Nancy Leson: 00:17:23 And they said, yeah. And I said, well, I could do that every week. And sure enough, that's what we did. So they decided to try to find someone at the station who had a great interest in food and there was Stein who had already done a food show that he was producing himself several years earlier and he had stopped doing that. And initially it was about him interviewing me, but it just became the show it is today, which is the two of us having an absolutely fabulous time talking about the thing we love to do most, which is cooking.

Paul Pitkin: 00:17:59 That's cool. So when did you start doing that with Stein?

Nancy Leson: 00:18:02 Halfway through 2006.

Paul Pitkin: 00:18:04 Okay.

Nancy Leson: 00:18:05 Yeah.

Paul Pitkin: 00:18:05 Yeah. So when you two get together, do you plan out your topics in advance or is it just you two show up in the room and you're both just start yakking?

Nancy Leson: 00:18:15 Well, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Due to the wonders of modern technology, we are not in the same room generally speaking, we are not even in the same city. So when we started doing it, there are two stations, there's a Tacoma station and a Seattle station, and Stein lives in Tacoma. So I would go down on my lunch break from the Times and sit as I'm right now in front of a microphone in a studio room by myself and flick a couple switches and I'd say, "Stein, are you there?" And he'd say, "Yes, I'm there." And he'd be doing the same in Tacoma.

Nancy Leson: 00:18:52 So that's how we did it for a long time. Then as technology got better, we started doing it remotely. I now have an iPhone with an application on it that allows me to do the same thing. He's still in Tacoma, in the studio with a headset on. And I am in my walking closet in my bedroom where it's really quiet, it's carpeted, there's a lot of clothing around me and it's the quietest place in the house.

Nancy Leson: 00:19:24 And in fact, a couple of weeks ago, and this always happens, it was noon 15 on a Tuesday or Monday. And we're talking, and we do the whole thing and he says, what's that noise? And I said, "You mean the lawnmower guys?" I said, "You haven't said anything online. I thought you weren't hearing it." And sure enough he said, "No, I hear it." So we had to make some adjustments for that. I always have to start right when I'm trying to talk Stein.

Paul Pitkin: 00:19:55 Closet is actually a really good studio. I recorded a whole album of vocals in my closet. It was great. Because it's clothes, they just-

Nancy Leson: 00:20:01 Absolutely.

Paul Pitkin: 00:20:02 ... soaks up all the sound.

Nancy Leson: 00:20:04 And in fact often we don't know way in advance what we're going to talk about at all. When I was working at the Times, initially we would run it off of a restaurant review or a story that

I wrote and that is what we would talk about. But then I started writing more and more about cooking, less about restaurants and it just becomes something that we mostly talk about cooking now. Although we do occasionally talk about restaurants or our memories of how things were when we were a kid. What was the first thing you remember eating? Stuff like that.

- Kurt Batdorf: 00:20:36 I just actually listened to that one.
- Nancy Leson: 00:20:38 That was a rerun.
- Kurt Batdorf: 00:20:39 Yes, it was a rerun. So you admitted that you ate a stick of butter as a toddler and that's your first food memory.
- Nancy Leson: 00:20:47 That's true. Yes.
- Justine Easley: 00:20:48 Very quickly, right?
- Nancy Leson: 00:20:50 What I remember about, and this is serious, all I remember is being in front of the refrigerator and having this butter, which is my husband by the way, would be rolling his eyes saying, of course she was three years old and eating butter, you should see what she does now. And he'd say, "Was it unsalted?" He doesn't like unsalted butter. He thinks I'm stuck up because I prefer unsalted butter. I think the reason I remember it was because I got in trouble. I actually had my bottom patched as we say, from word smacked, for having done so.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:21:28 Did you eat the whole stick?
- Nancy Leson: 00:21:29 I don't recollect whether I ate the whole stick, but-
- Paul Pitkin: 00:21:33 I was just wondering if that was one of those things where you bite into it and you realize immediately you've made a mistake or if you just keep going?
- Nancy Leson: 00:21:40 No I think had a salt shaker in my other hand. But I cooked from the time I was a child and I think that one of the things that's so important is to know how to cook. And I learned to cook early, not at my grandmother's elbow or something like that, but because my mom was a working person, I'm the oldest of four kids, we're all pretty close in age. If we wanted to eat, we had to know how to cook or it was just cereal and milk, right?
- Paul Pitkin: 00:22:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Nancy Leson: 00:22:08 So I got to be a substantially decent cook as a child. And one of my very serious memories, and I've recounted this far too many times I think, but I'll do it again anyway, is that my mom hated cooking with poultry. She just grossed her, some people are that way about chickens. But if we-

Kurt Batdorf: 00:22:28 My wife is like that. If we have chicken, I've got to be the chicken handler.

Nancy Leson: 00:22:31 Sure.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:22:31 That's okay by the way.

Nancy Leson: 00:22:32 And I became the chicken and I'm also the once a year the turkey handler in my house and I was 10 years old and I made the Thanksgiving turkey and I was basting it or I needed to baste it and I found the long part of the baster, but I didn't find the baster bulb so I thought, well, if I just [inaudible 00:22:52] just a little tiny bit, it's a wonder I can still speak these many years later.

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:00 Is that one of the techniques you recommend when you're teaching cooking?

Nancy Leson: 00:23:05 No.

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:08 So you cooked a turkey at 10. Why is turkey so lame so often?

Nancy Leson: 00:23:13 Yeah. So lame. Like you think-

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:14 Yeah, it's just not very good.

Nancy Leson: 00:23:15 Well, that's because you don't know how to make a good one because I would suggest that there are... We often make two different turkeys. We'll make one on the Weber or now we have a big green egg, we would do it on there. And my husband takes care of that and I do the one in the oven.

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:31 And then they both turn out okay?

Nancy Leson: 00:23:34 They turn out great. They're exceptional. I think there's just several tricks. You can Google Nancy Leson and Thanksgiving, you'll probably find a few of them.

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:42 I'd like to improve. I've had to do it the last few years and usually it's a four out of 10. Just dry and flavorless.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:23:50 Yeah, you need work then Paul.

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:52 Yeah.

Justine Easley: 00:23:52 Find a good rub, that's all you need.

Paul Pitkin: 00:23:55 That's [inaudible 00:23:55] rub.

Justine Easley: 00:23:56 Rub and put foil on it. I think that's when we turned the corner, when we didn't burn it and we tend to do it.

Nancy Leson: 00:24:03 Yeah. I actually do cheese cloth with melted butter and then I put the cheese cloth all over it.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:24:10 Again with the butter Nancy.

Justine Easley: 00:24:10 Butter is great.

Nancy Leson: 00:24:12 There's a theme here.

Paul Pitkin: 00:24:14 One of our co-host, Jessica, she said she deep fries turkey. I was flabbergasted by that. I didn't think you could deep fry turkey.

Nancy Leson: 00:24:22 You can. It's a thing, it's been a thing for a long time, but they always have these pictures of warning Will Robinson, because people hurt themselves with that on a regular basis.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:24:33 Yeah, burn their [inaudible 00:24:33] down.

Nancy Leson: 00:24:34 I've never done that.

Paul Pitkin: 00:24:35 Okay, good. I'm glad to hear it. Look like you had a follow up there, sorry.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:24:42 No.

Paul Pitkin: 00:24:44 Okay, good because I have lots of them. One of the things that you let us know about. So we have a big event coming up in May 9th. It's our TEDxSnoIsleLibraries and it's a TEDx event, but we do it at the Edmonds Center for The Arts. And this is the third time we've done it. And I heard you had a very successful auction item that went for the ECA and-

Nancy Leson: 00:25:06 That was a crazy moment for me. So I have to tell you something. I love the Edmonds Center For The Arts.

Paul Pitkin: 00:25:12 It's a great place.

Nancy Leson: 00:25:13 I'm an enormous proponent of my city. When I moved there with my then boyfriend who already had a house there 25 years ago, who I'm now married to, I just thought, Edmonds, this is where old people live. Tom Douglas once said me, "Nancy, you move into Deadmunds?" So the joke is on everybody because now everyone wants to move to Edmonds. Seattle's too crowded, the Edmonds school district was great for my family. And we've got real restaurants now and bars, get out of here. We used to be able to throw a bowling ball down the main street and there would be no one there.

Justine Easley: 00:25:50 And art walks, it's just [crosstalk 00:25:52]

Nancy Leson: 00:25:52 And the fabulous farmer's market. So when the ECA opened, I have many friends. In fact, I have a book club of women I've been involved with for a long time and they're all major sponsors and they spend a lot of money and they help the organization. And all I do is go to concerts and stuff, I don't even have a subscription, I've always felt really guilty about that. I really feel like I should be supporting it financially better in some way.

Nancy Leson: 00:26:21 So my pal, David Brewster, who's on the board there, he's the other David Brewster, because the original, my original David Brewster was the guy who was former owner of and founder of Seattle Weekly and co-founder of Crosscut and Town Hall, that David Brewster. But this David Brewster is really a wonderful fellow and also married to my local bookshop owner, Marykay Sneeringer. So the two of them own the bookshop together.

Paul Pitkin: 00:26:48 Great. What's the name of it?

Nancy Leson: 00:26:49 The Edmonds Bookshop.

Paul Pitkin: 00:26:51 Fancy that.

Nancy Leson: 00:26:54 Yeah, what do you know. It's an absolutely amazing bookstore and I think everyone should be spending money at their own independent bookstore when they're not supporting their local libraries. You have them both, that's why they're there. So anyway, I think Mary Kay came up with the idea that I should take people on an international tour of Edmonds, would stop at different restaurants, specialty stores. One of the things that killed me when I moved to Edmonds was I thought I wouldn't be able to find any good Asian food, which I eat across a broad spectrum and I would have to go back into Seattle to get good Asian food. But then it came to, me Chinese food explosion in

Edmonds because I think in large part because of the community college. Korean food, North and South of the city, Korean food's always been big. We have an enormous Korean community here. I've been eating and loving Korean food for 25 years. And of course then it became trendy, but I'm still eating at the same place [inaudible 00:27:54].

- Nancy Leson: 00:27:55 So they decided that'd be a great ideas and I agreed to do it. So I go to the gala event, I'd never been to it before. We're sitting there and it's just a wonderful live auction. The item comes up just before me, it's a Rick Steve's trip for two to your choice of, it was Paris, Rome or Spain, the airfare included for whatever the length, it was a week, two weeks, whatever the length of the trip was.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:28:26 That's all awful.
- Nancy Leson: 00:28:27 I know.
- Kurt Batdorf: 00:28:29 How do you follow that?
- Nancy Leson: 00:28:30 I know. And that went for, I think it was like \$8,000. And I was like, wow, that's great, boy, I wish I could afford that. Then arrows comes up, mine and David Brewster said he would drive the truck. I think he's going to borrow the ECA van. And so it's you and five of your closest friends go with Nancy Leson on a tour of highway 99 in Edmonds or whatever. And so then John Curley's up there and he starts doing that. There's music blaring and it gets up to about a \$1,000 and I'm like, okay, good.
- Kurt Batdorf: 00:29:00 Are we talking about fake news?
- Nancy Leson: 00:29:02 And then it just keeps going and going and going. Next thing I know it sells for \$11,000 and two seconds later there comes, will you sell it twice? So I raised \$22,000 for the Edmonds Center For The Arts. And I am not going to feel guilty about not subscribing or whatever, I'm done.
- Kurt Batdorf: 00:29:22 Yeah, that's an achievement.
- Justine Easley: 00:29:22 And you showed Rick Steves.
- Nancy Leson: 00:29:24 Well, I have a great story about Rick Steves. So his daughter Jackie used to babysit for my son years ago before she could drive. So one spring day I was taking her home after babysitting and I said, "So Jackie, do you have plans for the summer?" And she said, "I'm so excited." What are you going to do? This is the

first summer in my life, I'm not going to Europe. I thought that was hilarious.

Justine Easley: 00:29:55 All about perspective.

Paul Pitkin: 00:29:57 Well, as someone who run some auctions, that's incredible. And when you get the, can I sell another one thing, that means that you are truly an auction celebrity.

Nancy Leson: 00:30:07 Yes I'm a legend in my own mind.

Paul Pitkin: 00:30:09 You are definitely a legend. And have you done it yet? Have you done the actual-

Nancy Leson: 00:30:12 No, I have one set up for August 1st and the fine folks who bought that said they have friends coming up from Texas to do. I'm like, okay, I better figure out exactly where we're going and show them a good time. And it just goes to show that people, well, first of all, there are two sets of people who bought in and one lives in Kirkland and just loves the Edmonds Center For The Arts. I haven't set up the other one yet, but I'm so looking forward to that, it'll be fun. It's just hard for me to imagine that people can afford to do that, but if they can, best to keep it in my community.

Paul Pitkin: 00:30:48 Yeah. More power too them.

Justine Easley: 00:30:49 Yeah. Right on.

Paul Pitkin: 00:30:51 Well, like I said, we've used the ETA for our event twice and we're going back and for TEDxSnoIsleLibraries and we're really looking forward to it. Their whole staff is just amazing and the building's amazing and people come and they, it's just a good place to see a show.

Nancy Leson: 00:31:05 I could walk to it from my house, of course, I couldn't walk back up, but I could and have. But I think that everybody who lives in our general vicinity should at least have a look at the website there and see what's going on. There's many, many events, all different kinds. And it's a great place to see a concert.

Nancy Leson: 00:31:23 When I was a very young woman, if anyone would have ever told me when I was such a big Crosby [inaudible 00:31:30] and Nash fan, that one day Graham Nash was going to be sitting, standing, singing and talking to me and I was going to be singing our house at the end with 600 of my favorite friends, best friends with him this close to the house that I lived in, speaking

of houses, I would say get out of town. But that's the kind of great stuff we've got going on there.

Paul Pitkin: 00:31:53 Yeah, that's fantastic. Can I ask you an actual cooking question?

Nancy Leson: 00:31:58 Please.

Paul Pitkin: 00:32:01 Because this is very important. Because I've been trying to cook for the last 10 years and I-

Justine Easley: 00:32:06 Ongoing effort Paul?

Paul Pitkin: 00:32:09 It's a process, it's a journey. And I cook the same stuff over and over and I can't come up with new recipes and is that a common problem or am I just...

Nancy Leson: 00:32:22 You should be ashamed of yourself.

Paul Pitkin: 00:32:24 I think I should.

Nancy Leson: 00:32:25 Two reasons. One, is there's this thing called the internet. It has recipes on, there's YouTube video. So my son is an extraordinary cook. He's 21 years old. He's been cooking since he was younger than I started, maybe at eight standing at the stove and he sent me a YouTube video of something called Chinese cooking demystified. It's a young couple who show you with a walk. They're in their balcony in some big city, I don't know exactly where they live in China. And it's astonishing what they do with so little, with just a walk and long pair of chopsticks and some good ingredients.

Nancy Leson: 00:33:06 But you need to go to your local library just like I do and go to the cookbook section and it's amazing. So you just hear about all these great new cookbooks that have just come out or if you don't, maybe you should. Find a basic cookbook, something-

Paul Pitkin: 00:33:22 My sister gave me one and it was like, I can't remember what it's called. And I looked through it and I'm like, there was always some reason that I shouldn't cook whatever was in there.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:33:29 There's really no good reason not use a cookbook.

Nancy Leson: 00:33:32 There's not. And so I might suggest that you use or buy or get from the library. This Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat by Samin Nosrat.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:33:41 Write that down Paul.

Paul Pitkin: 00:33:43 Actually we should link to that.

Nancy Leson: 00:33:44 Well, you should. And Samin who was so interesting. She was a cook, and a cooking instructor in Northern California. And she wrote this book, it took her a long time and it won a lot of kudos from the people who give you awards for cookbooks, but it wasn't as well known in the greater community until she did this Netflix special.

Paul Pitkin: 00:34:09 Yeah, it was a really good series.

Nancy Leson: 00:34:09 It's four-part, documentary was amazing. So that book is a wonderful book for people who just don't understand a lot of stuff, want some great simple recipes, she has one recipe that I've tried several different times and fussed with the little for buttermilk chicken. You take a whole chicken and you just put it in a bag with buttermilk and salt, you're brining it and then roasting it. I've done that on the grill to great effect. And that's the thing. It's not a million ingredients. You probably have them in your house and if you don't, again, shame on you.

Paul Pitkin: 00:34:47 That's a great suggestion.

Nancy Leson: 00:34:49 But you should also take some cooking classes. So not just something that I teach, where I teach regularly at PCC. I teach at the Book Larder in Seattle and Fremont and one off set other schools. But find a cooking school that suits you, any of you, and come and learn. I take classes there all the time, at PCC. I love to see what other people teach, how they teach. You learn a couple of secrets from everybody.

Nancy Leson: 00:35:18 So just because you're an accomplished cook doesn't mean you're going to learn something new. I've been cooking Sichuan food over the last couple of months out of the new version of Fuchsia Dunlop's cookbook, *The Food of Sichuan*, and it's a revised edition of something she had done 20 years ago. She's a British writer and journalist who was the first North American to go to cooking school in the part of China, I think in the Sichuan province where she was studying years ago.

Nancy Leson: 00:35:47 And she's brilliant. And her recipes all work, which is really something. It's like Molly Stevens, another one of my favorite cookbook writers. So just find somebody who, I'll talk to you later, write you a little list. But we talk about this a lot in my show, *Food For Thought*, but you don't need a really heavy duty cookbook, just something simple that teaches you. Andrea Win's book, *Vietnamese*, well, I'm going to get this wrong. It's

like Vietnamese Food Any Day and it's how you can go into your local supermarket regardless of where you live. And when we have an embarrassment of riches here of Asian food ingredients in our local supermarkets.

- Nancy Leson: 00:36:29 But even if you lived in middle America, you could do this. And these are simple everyday recipes that are so exciting. I make other people's recipes all the time. I don't come up with a lot of stuff on my own.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:36:42 For me it's like I actually enjoy cooking, but I just, my [Uber 00:36:48] is not very complex.
- Nancy Leson: 00:36:50 Yeah. Well, it doesn't have to be, you just need to find a dozen things that you're great at and keep doing them.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:36:57 I get tired of my four mainstays, so yeah, I need to work on that.
- Justine Easley: 00:37:02 Well, I know we do have a book club here at Sno-Isle Libraries. I don't remember what branch they meet at, but they pick a book club each month and then they make dishes and they bring it to the actual libraries and talk about it.
- Nancy Leson: 00:37:15 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Paul Pitkin: 00:37:17 I want to be part of that book club.
- Justine Easley: 00:37:18 Yeah. I'll track down which one it is and we'll link to it and a description [crosstalk 00:37:22].
- Nancy Leson: 00:37:22 That's a great idea. I love that.
- Justine Easley: 00:37:23 Yeah. They talk about what they made, what issues they had with the recipes, and it's always something that's out of their comfort zone get them looking at different recipes.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:37:32 That's great.
- Nancy Leson: 00:37:33 My book club for a long time, and we still occasionally do it. Whoever chooses the book, that's whose house dinner is at, everyone else brings the side dishes and desserts and whoever's house it is, makes the main dish. And often, and certainly for a long time we've done this, we cook to the book. So if the book takes place in Spain, we might have Paiea, wherever it is. Or once I chose the Timothy Egan book, The Worst Hard Time, about the dust bowl.

Paul Pitkin: 00:38:02 Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Nancy Leson: 00:38:02 And so what are we going to cook? We thought about that and I said, "Think of something that you love that you would miss if you couldn't have it." So everybody cooked to that. And another of my favorite cook book club choices when it was my turn was read a book from your childhood or youth, when you were a young woman that you loved, that was considered a kid's book and you haven't read for years.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:38:30 That's all correct.

Nancy Leson: 00:38:30 And we all did that and talk and many of us had read many of the books but not all. And we talked about why we love those books. And I think being able to talk about cookbooks, to talk about the books that you love is one of the great joys of my life because people knew me as a writer, but I always think that my main job in life is to be a reader.

Paul Pitkin: 00:38:53 Well, that's definitely something that we promote at Sno-Isle. We've got lots of book groups and we've got lots of book discussion kits so they can be checked out. And I had a specific question about your Dust Bowl group. Did you see any, and you're talking about people cooking something that they couldn't live without, if it was going to be terrible. Was there any trend with what people brought? Was there a certain food that really stuck out?

Nancy Leson: 00:39:18 I can't remember. It was a long time ago. I did remember that I made Tiramisu.

Justine Easley: 00:39:25 Delicious.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:39:25 That would be hard to come about in the Dust Bowl.

Paul Pitkin: 00:39:29 Yeah, that's great. I want to, I know we don't have too much time left, but I wanted to ask you about your volunteering, because I thought it was great. It sounds like you'd love to teach math.

Nancy Leson: 00:39:40 Well, there's the punchline there. So I have long wanted to teach at my local elementary school, the one where my kid went. It's near my house, I could walk to it, I know a lot of the people there. And I kept putting it off and putting it off. So once I retired, as I like to say, from the Seattle Times in early 2014, I just didn't do it.

Nancy Leson: 00:40:04 And then last year I was having dinner with a friend of mine who's a reading instructor in the elementary schools. And I mentioned to her that I really wanted to start teaching at my local elementary school. And she said, "No, you need to come to my school." Because she had just started teaching these kids who were having reading problems. And she said she had a teacher in mind who really could use my help. And I did just that. I started working at one of the schools in the Edmonds district that is shocking to me how much help all of our elementary schools need, how much volunteer help they need, whether that's reading, writing or helping with homework.

Nancy Leson: 00:40:48 So I had no problem at all coming in and teaching, these are third graders, how to read and how to write and helping them along with that. But recently, the same teacher who I'm working with again this year, I just walked in and she said, okay, now we're doing math. And I was like, wait, that show where are you smart as a fifth grader?

Kurt Batdorf: 00:41:10 Yeah.

Nancy Leson: 00:41:10 I am not as smart as a third grader when it comes to math. And the kids don't believe me and it's been really great because they have these little flashcards, they're doing multiplications and I never learned my seven nines tables well. To this day, I still have to count and think about it in a very embarrassing way, I'm shocked I'm even telling you this publicly.

Nancy Leson: 00:41:29 The kids love this. I tell them, I know you think this is hard and I'm going to tell you how hard it was for me and how sorry that I didn't study those tables better so that I can remember things and do better in math. And I said, I did worse and worse and I don't want you to be me.

Paul Pitkin: 00:41:45 I thought you were going to say you're sorry for putting them through this.

Nancy Leson: 00:41:48 No, they loved when... And then I give them the flash cards and I say, okay, now you test me. And when I stop and I have to hesitate, they're shocked. And I think that the look on their faces was amazing to me because they realized that they think I'm smart, I'm a grownup, I'm old and I'm still having the same problems that they're having. But it makes them feel better about having those problems.

Paul Pitkin: 00:42:13 Yeah. It makes it relatable.

Justine Easley: 00:42:14 Demystifies it.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:42:15 We actually have a program called the third grade reading challenge, which is all about... It's interesting that you teach third graders because that's supposed to be a critical year in a kid's literacy. So the third grade, they'll either fall behind or they'll leap ahead depending on what happens. So we have a program where these teams of kids, they all read the same book.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:42:40 So it's teams of seven or eight kids, and they all read the same book, there's 58 schools that participate. [crosstalk 00:42:47]. Okay. So they all read the same book and they'd have these trivia competitions. And these kids are so excited about reading. I highly suggest you go to one of the finals.

Nancy Leson: 00:42:58 I would love to do that.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:42:58 It is one of the most adorable things you'll ever see in your life.

Julie Thompson: 00:43:02 Yeah. And I actually had an opportunity last night to volunteer as a guest judge at the semifinals, at the Mariner High School. And these kids are just so static and off the wall and they're really into these books. They have quite a few questions. I get harder and harder and it was just super exciting to be part of that.

Paul Pitkin: 00:43:23 Thank you. That was the voice of Julie Thompson, collection librarian.

Nancy Leson: 00:43:27 There's the job I want, collections librarian.

Paul Pitkin: 00:43:30 Yeah. You explained it so much better than I could. It's just so great. I think it's just interesting that you're working with third graders. Now if I was told that I was going to teach math, I would whip out the computer and open Excel, that would be my thing.

Nancy Leson: 00:43:45 But think about it honestly, nine times seven is?

Kurt Batdorf: 00:43:48 63.

Nancy Leson: 00:43:49 Thank you.

Justine Easley: 00:43:51 Kurt is showing off.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:43:53 I do the answer because I started thinking of it as soon as you said sevens and nines.

Paul Pitkin: 00:43:58 Well, it has been just absolutely wonderful to have you and I want to let everybody know that we're going to have links to the things that we've discussed, some of those great cookbooks and we might even have them in our library collection. So we're going to have links to all that stuff on our, go to our homepage, Check It Out. And that there is a link on sno-isle.org, or you can go to the Check It Out page and I want to thank my co-host today Justine Easley. Thank you, Justine.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:44:26 Thanks Justine.

Paul Pitkin: 00:44:27 Kurt Batdorf, thank you very much.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:44:29 My pleasure.

Paul Pitkin: 00:44:30 Julie Thompson, a newbie, thank you for coming out.

Justine Easley: 00:44:33 Thank you.

Julie Thompson: 00:44:34 All right, thank you.

Paul Pitkin: 00:44:35 And thanks to producer Zach and I want to thank most of all Nancy Leson. Nancy is absolute pleasure in... And again, I want to thank you for hosting our event five years ago.

Nancy Leson: 00:44:44 Yeah, you bet. And I think that was the first event that they had at the Cascade Museum.

Paul Pitkin: 00:44:48 Yeah, absolutely it was. And we were very nervous about it because we didn't know what was going to happen and it turned out great and it was all because of you.

Nancy Leson: 00:44:55 Thank you.

Paul Pitkin: 00:44:55 Thank you very much.

Nancy Leson: 00:44:55 It was wonderful to be here. What a great thing you do to continue to convince people that the libraries are there for so many different reasons, for so many of us, for so many reasons. And I can afford books, I have my own computer, but it's nothing like going into my local library and feeling like I'm part of the community. That there are books that I didn't even know existed in there, that I could look at them and take them home for free.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:45:22 Thanks Nancy.

Paul Pitkin: 00:45:23 So you might find that, we're just going to use your voice for a bumper for now on. Thanks so much, Nancy.

Speaker 1: 00:45:31 Is there a preschooler running around in your life? Then check out the Sno-Isle Libraries countdown to kindergarten list of 100 essential picture books. Find this book list and many more online at Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:45:46 We love hearing from our listeners and subscribers, especially if you enjoyed a guest or have a suggestion for a future topic, drop us a line at checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org. Again, that's checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org and let us know what you're thinking. Don't be surprised if we read your comment or answer your question on a future podcast episode.

Paul Pitkin: 00:46:17 That was an incredible conversation. I think everybody, all of us enjoyed it. Nancy is just fantastic to have in this setting. It's just wonderful when somebody has that many stories and is willing to tell them. And of course I got to learn a little bit that I am truly ashamed of of my cooking status.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:46:37 I think I have more than four go tos, Paul.

Paul Pitkin: 00:46:39 No, it's four go tos.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:46:42 Read more than that, is what I'm saying.

Paul Pitkin: 00:46:44 No, I need more and macaroni and cheese doesn't count. And I thought Justine had a really great idea. I think we should go around the room, go around the horn and everybody talk about their first food experience and hopefully it's disgusting and gross. Justine, why don't you start.

Justine Easley: 00:47:03 You want me to kick it off?

Paul Pitkin: 00:47:04 Yeah.

Justine Easley: 00:47:05 So the first memory I have of eating anything was at my grandma's house, where she would watch us when my mom needed to run errands or when she went back to work. And my grandma, amazing lady, little bit lower of a threshold of what was a toy. So we spend a lot of time in the yard, a lot of time playing with sticks, a lot of times building random structures with weeds and plants. She gave us bags of uncooked rice to play with. And I distinctly remember a handful of

uncooked rice being taste tested by a very young me. And it was a horrible experience. And that instant regret and that instant feeling that your entire body and your soul were drying out or the rise.

Paul Pitkin: 00:47:58 I don't know what is weirder to me, the fact that you actually ate uncooked rice where that your grandmother thought that was a toy?

Justine Easley: 00:48:05 Yeah.

Paul Pitkin: 00:48:06 What are you going to do with rice.

Justine Easley: 00:48:07 Take some rice to the yard and go play with it.

Paul Pitkin: 00:48:09 Throw it at each other? I don't get it.

Justine Easley: 00:48:12 I think it was maybe it's a rattle, it's a fun texture and [crosstalk 00:48:16]

Kurt Batdorf: 00:48:16 Beam bag thing.

Justine Easley: 00:48:16 ... irreversible.

Paul Pitkin: 00:48:20 Here you go, honey. Why don't you play with some rocks? That would be more fun. Julie please.

Julie Thompson: 00:48:26 Man, it's hard for me to remember a first memory, but I know when I was little I used to love salt, just eating salts.

Paul Pitkin: 00:48:33 Just when you were little.

Julie Thompson: 00:48:34 Yeah. I would crawl on top of the stove and lick salt shakers. I've gotten better about it now, but I don't know.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:48:42 I think you can reach the stove top now.

Justine Easley: 00:48:46 Now you can reach the pepper.

Julie Thompson: 00:48:47 No I can have my own salt.

Paul Pitkin: 00:48:50 That's [inaudible 00:48:50]. You should have your blood pressure checked.

Julie Thompson: 00:48:52 No, but thankfully I eat quite a bit less salt now.

Paul Pitkin: 00:48:56 Okay. That's good. Maybe you OD'd on it. Took care of the-

Julie Thompson: 00:49:01 Turned my life around.

Paul Pitkin: 00:49:02 Yeah, exactly. Kurt.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:49:06 Oh God. I don't remember this happening, but my mom tells me that one morning when I was two or three, I wandered into my parents' bedroom with an empty bottle of tetracycline. Just this giant yellow stain around my mouth. And mom and dad, their eyes got as big as Zach's just did when I related this. And they apparently rushed me to the pediatrician and he said, well, he's not going to have any infections for a while, but no harm. And so yeah, there was that. And then Julie talking about salt and my maternal grandfather was a dairy farmer in Burlington. And so my brother and I would dare each other to lick salt block out of the cow barn.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:49:57 But the first food I really remember eating is my mom's chocolate chip cookie dough. [crosstalk 00:50:08] And she was a home-ec major and she loved baking and cooking and she really taught me pretty much all I know about baking and cooking. The cookie dough better than the tetracycline or the cow salt put.

Paul Pitkin: 00:50:21 I could imagine.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:50:22 And you Paul.

Paul Pitkin: 00:50:24 Well, my mom was not a home-ec teacher. My mom was the worst cook I've ever eaten from. So and she hated to cook. She lives alone now and never cooks. She gets everything delivered.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:50:41 So you inherited that.

Paul Pitkin: 00:50:43 Yes, indeed. It was amazing when I started cooking myself, I realized, you can add flavor to things. So my mom, she hated cooking. And so she would just make up crap, she would just go through the kitchen and just throw stuff together and think it was edible.

Kurt Batdorf: 00:51:01 And my mom did that too, and she called it goo but it was usually pretty good.

Paul Pitkin: 00:51:07 My mom had one thing she called slab dab, but it was actually good. Yeah slab dab. But for the most part, it was just heinous. And so the thing I remember the most, and sometimes you'd walk up, you'd be really hungry and you're going into the kitchen. And of course it was ridiculous that my mom was doing all the cooking, not just for gender roles, but because she hated

it. No one should do something they hate, but you walk up into the kitchen and you just knew instantly, God, dinner's going to suck, where's the dog?

- Paul Pitkin: 00:51:36 You just knew it. But I remember the worst thing she made was a casserole because it was always a casserole. And it had hamburger tomato from a can raisins and then it was topped with potato chips.
- Justine Easley: 00:51:59 That's all a nice textures in there.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:52:01 It's a lot going on.
- Justine Easley: 00:52:04 Crunchy. Maybe the thing I'm hung up on is the raisins, I'm on board with the rest of it.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:52:09 Well, here's the thing, imagine potato chips in an oven cooked when they're already cooked. It was vile. So that's my food experience. So I hope that if you were hungry listening to the Nancy Leson, you are no longer so, I apologize. After our discussion-
- Justine Easley: 00:52:32 You know it's the lunch hour.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:52:34 Exactly. I want to thank everybody for listening again. It was an absolute pleasure to do this podcast as it always is and it was great to have some new folks co-hosting with us and we're looking forward to seeing you next time on Check It Out. Thank you.
- Ken Harvey: 00:52:55 So connecting with me via the internet is world famous TEDxSnoIsleLibraries speaker and author. She's a psychotherapist and also licensed marriage and family therapist, Sarri Gilman. Hi Sarri.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:53:08 Hi Ken. It's great to talk with you today.
- Ken Harvey: 00:53:12 Gosh, I am so glad that you're able to connect with us. Hey, we've been working with you behind the scenes for a number of months on a new project, which we're really excited to begin sharing with our audience. So beginning with this podcast episode will feature reviews from you on certain titles in the library collection and those reviews will show up periodically in our podcast. And in addition, you also have some reviews that you're going to be doing that'll be showing up as blogs on the Sno-Isle Library's website. So would you tell us a little bit about

the subject matter you're hoping to cover in this new podcast feature on blogging and who you think will find it useful?

Sarri Gilman: 00:53:54 I am so excited to be joining in and sharing with the Sno-Isle audience and listeners about these different book reviews that I'm going to be doing all focused on the self-help shelf.

Ken Harvey: 00:54:14 Wait, sorry. Let me just jump in. So what did you just call that?

Sarri Gilman: 00:54:18 The self-help shelf because there's a section in every library that's really self-help books. And I think that these books are pretty complicated to navigate through and figure out which of these books are really helpful, which of these books are maybe useful for a very specific issue going on in somebody's life at a very particular time. And so I really want to call out the books that I think are literally as good as therapy, books that really help, books that really make a difference.

Sarri Gilman: 00:54:58 Some of these books you're not even going to find on that shelf in the library, in the self-help section because some of these books are going to be for children and they are going to be in the children's section. And we're going to be featuring them, I'll be featuring them as books that I think could be used for helping children navigate through emotions, helping adults navigate through feelings and through difficult challenges, helping couples, helping families. So I think there's a wide range of books to pick from, but I'd like to call the best, the things that help the most.

Ken Harvey: 00:55:37 So let me make sure that our audience has this straight. So periodically on the Check It Out podcast and also in a blog that will be showing up on the Sno-Isle Library's website, you'll be providing reviews for self-help materials that are part of the library's collection and then some of those reviews will be really targeting or to benefit adults and some of them really adults and families and then some really for children and the caregivers of those children. Is that correct?

Sarri Gilman: 00:56:17 Yes. We're going to cover all ages. There are books out there that can help us through every stage in life, through every age, through every feeling, every experience. They're all out there and we're not just going to focus on one category or one age group, I'm just going to be calling out books that can make a difference in this whole wide range of ages and stages. And you'll figure out the books that really speak to you and issues that are going on right now in your life and which of these books can help you now.

- Ken Harvey: 00:56:53 Sarri, I understand that you've been working with Jessica Russell, who's the library's collection services manager and the two of you have been working to ensure that our listeners and blog readers can actually find the titles that you're referring to. So these aren't just titles that were part of your own personal library, they'll find them available through the library?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:57:15 Right. We are working very closely and Jessica has been making sure to get extra copies of titles all in digital format right now because right now that's the way that everybody is able to access books from the library and materials. So they'll be digital books for adults and for kids. I don't know if you've all used the Libby system, but that's amazing. You can read a whole book on Libby and you can get them all through Sno-Isle Libraries. So Jessica and I have been talking behind the scenes to make sure that the books are in digital format and that there's more copies available in the system so that more of us can be reading the same book at the same time.
- Ken Harvey: 00:58:03 So when you mentioned Libby, Libby is an app that is made possible by a company called Overdrive. And Overdrive is a company that the library works with to provide access to literally hundreds of thousands of titles online. And so Libby is an easy to use mobile app that can go on your smart device and gosh, it means that wherever you are, you can download an electronic book and just have access to, enjoy it and benefit from it regardless of where you are and what you're doing.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:58:40 Yes. And if you don't want to read your books from Libby and from Sno-Isle Libraries in the digital format, if you don't want to read them on your phone, you can also get them onto your Kindle very easily. I am honestly, I'm opening up Libby more than I'm opening up Facebook these days. I am so excited about this app and I am trying to tell every parent out there because you can get all these books for children on there too and kids go through books pretty quickly. And so you during the coronavirus here, you might need a lot more books available and you can get them all digitally. So Jessica and I are working to make sure that the recommendations that I picked for the self-help shell are all available digitally through the library system.
- Ken Harvey: 00:59:34 So one of the reasons why that is so important, and you mentioned that right now available digitally is because as we're taping this, the libraries are closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and so for whatever duration of time that the libraries are closed or not providing made easy physical access to our printed materials, these materials are available online and of course, the podcast is always available online as well and

the website for your blog review. Well, I really appreciate that. So let me just ask you another question. This one I don't think you're quite expecting. How do you figure out which book titles to review?

Sarri Gilman: 01:00:33 So that is a great question. First of all, I'm a really big reader, let me just confess. I am doing something I already love to do, but I want to be sure that if I'm going to give a review on a book, it's going to be a book that I think is a fabulous read and very helpful. So I'm not just revealing books and saying, "Well, this one was okay and this one didn't do very much." I'm not going to bother to waste your time or mine reading that. I am only calling out the books that I think are extremely helpful and useful. And I sort through a lot of books to pull out the ones that are going to make the most difference and the ones that are to a specific issue, like maybe a book on grief for a book on dealing with your feelings on compassion or on how to take care of your heart when you're hurting.

Sarri Gilman: 01:01:42 I'll read all the way through it, I read every page of these books. But I know generally within the first 10 pages, if this author is writing something that's going to be even worth my time to read it and then if it's worth my time to read it, I have to feel like I'm learning something, I'm finding something useful and I can see in my head how people can use this book. If you can understand it, if you can follow it easily and learn something from the material because self help books are really about learning. When it comes to adults, it's about giving us tools, about giving us tips for getting through things in a way that is going to be helpful to us. Now when I'm looking at books for children, I'm looking at something different. I'm thinking about emotional literacy.

Sarri Gilman: 01:02:33 A lot of people don't know this because I am a psychotherapist and that's really how I work. But I also have a bachelor's in education and special education. And children's books has been something I've collected for years. So I'm excited to also share children's book titles. But I'm thinking about emotional literacy. And when I pick books, I'm thinking about books where parents can have conversations and grandparents can have conversations with kids about feelings. And sometimes it's very hard to talk directly about something a child is going through. But it's much easier to talk about a character in a story that's going through that and ask what they think about what that character is going through.

Sarri Gilman: 01:03:20 And so in addition to those book picks, I want to give you some tips on what kinds of emotional vocabulary you can build with

children starting from very young three years old, going all the way through adolescence. And I do highly recommend that parents read some of the books that their kids read at every age because you can have these amazing conversations that you might not be able to have with your kids otherwise.

- Ken Harvey: 01:03:56 Sarri maybe one last question. How did you come up with this idea?
- Sarri Gilman: 01:04:08 I have my own blog from my psychotherapy site and my boundary site. And so I had been writing a blog, and every now and then I was picking books. And what I noticed is people were reading the books and talking about it and sending me emails about the book and how much they were getting out of it. And I thought, this is really great, people are finding it helpful to hear about these books and what's useful about them. And I thought that this would be more valuable to a bigger audience than the people that may be read my personal blog. And I thought it would be really helpful for the Sno-Isle audience because you have so many libraries and you can reach so many more people.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:04:59 And I thought, well, this is a great way for others to hear about these books that are in the library collection that help us through so many challenging things. I really just wanted to call that out. And so I came to Sno-Isle and people are finding these book recommendations really helpful, do you think this could help others? And so here we are. I've been in conversation with me for many months about this. It's odd, the timing now that it's coming out.
- Ken Harvey: 01:05:38 Yeah. Isn't it so interesting that this seems to just be surfacing as if it's only about the COVID-19 pandemic and anxieties around that. But that actually you had said early on to me that individuals are always going through things.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:06:02 That's right, we're always going through things. And so I was just thinking self-help books are very useful and I always recommend them in therapy and it would be nice to spread some of those recommendations further. But now here we are in a pandemic and people are going through so many emotions, every day it's such an emotional experience and so many changes and losses and transitions and how you are relating with your family. Everything has changed.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:06:40 And so certainly building up some emotional strength and skills to navigate all those, is going to be really, really helpful right now. And so it just so happened that we already had this in the works and that right now is a great time to launch this podcast

and this blog feature on Sno-Isle. So I'm looking forward to sharing this with Sno-Isle members.

Ken Harvey: 01:07:12 Well, so are we. And so Sarri, I really want to express how much we appreciate the insights that you're offering to us. I want to thank you so much for how you just continue to give to our communities and your work in making us all emotionally more healthy. And so coming up next, Sarri Gilman and the self-help shelf.

Sarri Gilman: 01:07:38 My pick this month for adults is Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff. Here's a quote from her book. Unlike self-criticism, which asks if you're good enough, self-compassion asks, what's good for you? Okay, well let's take a moment and let me tell you how much I am recommending this book to everybody. Everybody I see, everybody I talk to in my therapy practice, out in the community. I'm just saying, you must read this book. Have you gotten this book, Self-Compassion? This is a great read, it is so essential for all of us and it is helpful for these times. It has really practical skills that I think you'll be able to use every day.

Sarri Gilman: 01:08:22 All of us go through tough moments when our feelings are hurt or we're embarrassed or we're struggling with something really hard. And Kristin Neff teaches you how to soothe yourself when you're hurting. If a friend came to you and told you they were struggling with something hard in their life, you'd probably listen patiently, you'd probably be understanding and you say something kind to them. But notice, that when you're going through something difficult and your feelings are hurt, you may be reactive and find yourself spinning into despair.

Sarri Gilman: 01:08:57 Most of us don't know how to give self-compassion to ourselves, and self-compassion is a simple practice that's easy to learn from this book. Here's another quote from Kristin. If you're able to comfort yourself every time something painful happens, staying centered and not running away with reactivity, you can start to trust yourself. You can more easily find inner courage when hard times hit, knowing that you can get through almost anything with the help of your own compassionate support.

Sarri Gilman: 01:09:33 You're building this sense with self-compassion work of inner strength inside about being able to count on yourself as well. Now I love that she includes a section on this book that is not just about how to use self-compassion only with you, but she also teaches how you can use it with other people, how you can teach the skills to a child, how you can share it with a teenager, how you use self-compassion in relationship with your partner.

- Sarri Gilman: 01:10:04 So there's lots of ways that you can use these skills. And if you've been someone that has tried to work on your self-esteem or your sense of self worth and you feel like you have struggled with low self-esteem, this book will help you understand why that hasn't worked because she has been researching self-esteem and she has found that self-compassion is actually a much more effective pathway and it's more valuable to dealing with that feeling of inner worthiness.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:10:38 So this book is easy to understand. It makes self-compassion doable and once you learn the skill, you're going to be reaching for self-compassion all the time. You're going to wonder how you got this far without it. Okay. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the book. My pick for this month is a book for middle grade readers that's age nine to 11 and the book is, *The Nest* by Kenneth Oppel, illustrated by John Klassen.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:11:07 Have you ever wished that your life was different? This is a story about a boy named Steve who's about 12 years old and he has a baby brother who is born with serious health issues. And Steve's parents are very worried about the baby and they often need to take him to doctors and to the hospital. Steve doesn't know what to do to help his baby brother. Here's a quote from the book. Before I turned out my bedside light, I went through my two lists. First I read all the things that there were to be grateful for and next was the list of people I wanted to keep safe. I didn't really know who I was asking, maybe it was God, but I didn't really believe in God, so this wasn't praying exactly.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:11:57 Steve's anxiety about his baby brother leads him into making a wish for his brother to be perfect. Steve's wish starts coming true and he has found a way to get help through a creature that he meets in his dream. And Steve is talking to the creature in his dream that is promising to help make his baby brother perfect. Well, how are you going to fix the baby? Would it be some angelic surgery? Did it involve spells or actual medicines or are you just going to use words of power? Are you going to touch him with magical gossamer caresses?
- Sarri Gilman: 01:12:40 This book is a page turner and it keeps the suspense just rising higher and higher as the stakes keep climbing as Steve's dream becomes real, when the helpful creature comes into reality, stepping out of the dream, Steve is forced to protect his baby brother from the creature and Steve discovers that he can be afraid and brave all at the same time. This is a great book for parents to read along with too, because you can have some great conversations about Steve's experience of fear, illness, his

coping skills, and ultimately, self-acceptance. I love this tender, emotional roller-coaster ride of a book.

Ken Harvey:

01:13:30

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