

Wynne Leon (00:04)

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter podcast. Join us as we celebrate the brilliance of authors, storytellers, and creators. I'm Wynne Leon and in this inspiring episode, my co-host Vicki Atkinson and I are with blogger, poet, and author Michele Lee Sefton. Michele's book, *Jade's Broken Bridge*, launches on October 10th. In it,

Michele draws from events of her past and tells a story that she hopes will help others in similar situations. She gives us the elevator pitch for her book and tells us about what inspired her to move through fear and find her courage. In the wake of her father's death in 2019, she realized that life is fleeting. With her shoulders squared, she faced her fears and redefined her future. She started blogging.

flying on transatlantic trips, and in the past few years even took up pole dancing. Michele tells us about the 50 stories project she did that was the genesis of *Jade's Broken Bridge*. We talk about writing as a tool for healing and perspective. Michele encourages everyone to give ourselves the time and grace to She tells us about her other projects in the works.

including republishing the novellas she's written and publishing a book of her beautiful photography and poetry. This is a great episode full of heart and courage. We know you'll

Hi Michele!

Michele Lee Sefton (02:04)

Hi!

Wynne Leon (02:05)

We

are so excited to talk to you. mean, it's as we said, it's just great to see you in person or on Zoom as close as we can get.

Michele Lee Sefton (02:15)

Thank you. It's wonderful to be here and to meet both of you. And I look forward to talking about the book and other things I have going on.

Wynne Leon (02:22)

Yeah, we can't wait. speaking of your book, your book, *Jade's Broken Bridge* will be released the day we air this podcast, which is October 10th. Can you give us the elevator pitch for your novel?

Michele Lee Sefton (02:36)

Yeah, thank you. I'd be happy to. So set in the late 1980s, *Jade's Broken Bridge* is a gripping story of a young woman whose fractured family ties, isolation, and financial desperation drive her into the adult entertainment industry, where survival, self-destruction, and the fight to reclaim her worth collide.

Wynne Leon (03:07)

So good. mean, there's just so much richness there. mean, let's just talk about the late 80s, which we all love. But yeah, that struggle between self-worth and survival. mean, it's just, the age that Jade is, is just so good.

Michele Lee Sefton (03:28)

Yeah, I'd also like to add, based on the age of the protagonist, that the novel is, it is considered new adult fiction, and it also crosses over into women's fiction, which could, it could make it an appealing story for older women who are perhaps wanting to look back at their life, life choices with acceptance.

So I think it does appeal to a few different audiences.

Vicki Atkinson (04:03)

goodness.

Wynne Leon (04:03)

Well,

it sort of reminds me of something I saw that you wrote about writing this, because that look back, you said, now at 56, and with my courage rising, I find myself being called to help others, not from a position of self-righteousness or by flooding posts with unsolicited advice, but gently and authentically from a place of compassion and understanding delivered

through a poet sensitive pen. ~ You went so good and I love that phrase with your courage rising. mean, that is what we can do by looking back on these things. But can you say more about how you found that courage?

Michele Lee Sefton (04:36)

Wow.

Yeah, well first thank you for highlighting an excerpt from a blog post that means a lot to me I appreciate that ~ I would say and and I'm really excited to talk about this topic of finding courage Which is really about moving through our fear, which we all have you know we have we all have that over different things however, that might show up and for me

My courage has been rising for a few years, which was sparked by losing my father in 2019 on Valentine's Day. losing him and being with him in that moment, it really showed me for the first time how fleeting life is and how precious it is. it was really losing him was my wake up call to

start making some changes and working on some life goals I had often set aside. And that started with diving into writing that summer. ~ I made the very difficult decision after losing him to leave the high school classroom as a teacher. And then I just started writing something I wanted to do as long as, know, like we all so often we say as writers.

something that I always wanted to do. And that began with just writing that summer and then that late summer, I posted my first blog post and I was terrified to do that. but I did it and I think a lot of

us can relate to that, you know, that first post that we're sharing ourselves with the world. So that was the first step.

But it, it gave me, you know, the first step of finding my writing voice and I've continued to strengthen that over the years. And then not long after, I faced another fear, which was flying over the Atlantic and I long dreamed about traveling internationally, but I was terrified. there's that, there's that friction between.

what you want and what you want to experience in life and fear. losing my father taught me what I mentioned, but also it taught me that death really isn't that scary and witnessing it in the way that I did. so that gave me, I bring that up because that might help some of your viewers who are struggling with the fear of flying.

And so once I accepted that and owned that, I was able to get on a plane and fly. And I've done it three times in the last years. I've traveled through Europe three times with a group, know, mostly teachers. finding the courage to get on that plane and fly over that, you know, massive stretch of

of ocean. was something I didn't think I'd ever be able to do. And of course, my life's been enriched by it. To be able to see other parts of the world has just been amazing. then moving through more fear, or moving beyond the comfort zone, two and a half years ago, ~ I signed up for a pole class.

pole dancing class. And as a 50, well, I was 53 at the time, think, you know, a little bit intimidating and all of my...

Wynne Leon (08:35)

than a little bit I would imagine.

Michele Lee Sefton (08:37)

And

you know, I've danced in one way or another my whole life, but this was just altogether different experience. And I didn't think I would be able to climb to the top of the pole. It's just something I thought, yeah, I'll learn some things. But anyway, a few months later, I did it. And that just, you another step in moving beyond.

the fear of trying something different has, it has deepened my confidence and my resilience, which has helped me writing and soon to be releasing Jade's Broken Bridge. every time I move through the fear and let it not consume me, then I prove to myself I can do hard things.

Vicki Atkinson (09:26)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (09:26)

You

know what I mean about all three of those things is that you took one step like publishing one post, know, go to class, but say, you know, I don't have to climb to the top yet. And those things are, they're steps that feel they're, they're big and they're scary, but you're moving through courage by

taking the first step. And then all the ones that follow lead to publishing it, your debut novel and all that other stuff, but it's just.

Michele Lee Sefton (09:35)  
Exactly.

Wynne Leon (09:55)  
doing that first step.

Michele Lee Sefton (09:57)  
I love that you bring that up because it really is, it really is. It makes it all possible. Yeah. And that's how I taught my students when we were working on research papers. I broke it all down for them step by step. I really think that that approach gets us to our goal.

Vicki Atkinson (10:02)  
Hmm.

What I think is so powerful about your story and know, Wynne and I of course loved Jade's Broken Bridge, we loved it. But what's so powerful about it I think is, you know, from where you are now, the looking back and telling the story, Michele, because I think, you know, what you're both talking about the loss of your father and kind of the inspiration to write and to be vulnerable, is this message that we get sometimes that we need to make haste.

You know, and have purpose, be purpose driven. And I know that your book is going to help young women, women in midlife or older, you know, that are also doing that looking back about choices and circumstances and phases of life, you know, that were bumpy. But the cumulative, you know, outcome of all of that is this

glorious reminder that wherever we are right now is pretty magical because we're alive. So I know that all that vulnerability that you show is going to do just a world of good. And you wrote something on page 120 that I kind of marked because I really, really liked it. And the clarity of what you said, you wrote, Alone in My Car.

always alone it seemed trying to survive is a lonely business. think there are young women that I know that I taught and counseled that made some of the choices that Jade did and found themselves in circumstances where they felt like they were living multiple lives. You who knows what about, you know, what their lives are really like. And I think the net effect of that is to feel so isolated. So

Readers may never get to meet you like we are, but they're gonna get your heart through the story and it's gonna give lift to lots of young folks that I think are struggling with, I'm a bad person, I've made bad choices, and all that fatalistic thinking. So all of that in my long-winded way of saying, you're doing good for lots of people that you may never meet. I just know that.

Michele Lee Sefton (12:36)  
Thank you so much. That belief is what kept me moving forward on those difficult days of writing and just holding that thought of that person who might be experiencing something like that or

might be headed that way and they don't even know it yet. And this idea of being, survival is a lonely business.

I mean, it definitely can be, especially when you're like my character who is on their own, you know, without support and they're facing, well, I just need to eat tonight. You know, they don't have the luxury of socializing or it's just survival is like the priority. Yeah. You know, can lead to desperate times Thank you.

Wynne Leon (13:33)

Yeah. And you've mentioned being a high school teacher. You saw situations where you believed talking with openness could influence and help young adults. And I think that's what Vicki just highlighted there, is providing that help with your poet's sense of softness, right?

Michele Lee Sefton (13:58)

Yeah, definitely.

Wynne Leon (13:59)

Yeah, think Vicki has a favorite quote, write your story and it'll be someone else's survival guide. Am I getting that right?

Michele Lee Sefton (14:07)

Well.

Vicki Atkinson (14:07)

Yeah, when I was writing, it's a quote that I stole from Brene Brown, but it's, you know, I'm imagining Michele that there were moments when you were writing Jade's story when maybe you stalled or wanted to stop, even though you were inspired and you had purpose. you have any advice for writers that are writing, you know, deep, poignant stories about how to keep going when you're those tough days come and you're not sure you've got it in you? How did you do it?

Michele Lee Sefton (14:36)

When I was in the middle of it, think what I mentioned about holding onto that reader who this story could help, that was the strongest motivation for me to get through those difficult days, which, know, as you alluded to, those were moments where, you know, I cried my way through it. And it was just holding onto that, that knowing that this story

has the potential to offer hope to people. That's what kept me going. And now that I've written it and I can look back on that writing process, I would say that the experience of writing something that is heavy and intense and drawn from your life experiences that might be heavy is

looking back, I realized how much I was able to release by writing this story. Yeah. And it honestly, it felt like a, it did feel like just like a release, like I could feel myself getting lighter. Yeah. With every page and every chapter and in it, writing is such a mysterious process at times, as you both know, that we don't know.

First of all, it's gonna show up when we're writing until we sit down and do it. And when you're writing like, you know, something that can have a healing component to it, like, you know, personal

narrative, and then also what we focus on in the writing classes that I assist with is that when you give yourself the time and grace to sit down and write a story,

Vicki Atkinson (16:07)  
So true.

Michele Lee Sefton (16:31)  
then amazing healing perspectives can come through. when I first started writing the story, it was actually a short story. Can I talk a little bit about that? That summer, after I made the decision to leave teaching and everything that came along with that. ~

Vicki Atkinson (16:51)  
You said, right?

Michele Lee Sefton (16:52)  
I 20 19, I had just turned 50 and I started writing a, it was a personal writing project that I call 50 Life Stories. And it was, it was simple in idea in that it was just, I was just giving myself the time to write 50 stories from my life. So personal narratives and without an agenda, just letting one story idea flow to the next. And

One of those short stories was based on my experience as a young woman working in gentlemen's clubs. I say gentlemen's clubs. as a young person. And while I was writing that story, had something happened. I had an epiphany that allowed me to then move on and

write a longer story. I want to share this with your audience because this would not have happened if I wasn't writing without a doubt. So while I was working on a story, the short story, for the first time I saw that all the shame I had carried all alone or alone as this

Vicki Atkinson (17:58)  
Yeah.

Michele Lee Sefton (18:17)  
from this period of my life, for the first time I saw the contribution or ~ the role that the men played in that experience, in those clubs, the customers. I never saw it that way before. I carried all of the shame of my choices and reflected on that as poor choices and all of that. And that change in perspective,

allowed me to see the story from, you know, a different place. And that opened the door to what became this longer manuscript. And I do want to add that is a technique that we call reframing in the writing workshops. And I had learned it by first being a participant with author Sandra Marinella. She's the author I work with.

And after that workshop, she asked if I would be interested in working with her. And I said, absolutely, yes, because she's doing great work. And then it was early 2020 when I began working with her. And our first workshop was at Mayo Clinic in North Phoenix in person. And the very end of that workshop is when COVID hit.

Vicki Atkinson (19:43)

my goodness.

Michele Lee Sefton (19:44)

So we went online, she was very quick to respond to the needs of her readers and we've been online since then.

Wynne Leon (19:55)

It reminds me of what you're talking about. And this is going to seem like a kind of a weird segue, but when I was climbing mountains, there was a guide who, who would tie crepe paper to trees on, on routes that he didn't know very well. and I asked him about it and he said, when you come down a mountain, it looks different than when you come up. If you, when you turn around and look at a trail of where you've walked or where you've been, it looks.

Totally different the light is different the time of day is different and that just the angle I mean you think that you're gonna remember that at this why you took a right? But it's gonna look different and it's the same thing with writing It's so powerful because as you you know, just we're talking about we're going up the mountain But it isn't until we turn around that we see that different perspective. Yeah, and writing helps us flip it like that

Vicki Atkinson (20:49)

Yeah.

Michele Lee Sefton (20:50)

That's a powerful metaphor.

Vicki Atkinson (20:53)

And it comes through Michele, because I think what you just described about the 50 short stories and then this particular story, I mean, it clearly spoke to you and whether it was from reframing, which is also a really great therapeutic technique just generally. I love that you're doing that work with your partner. Because I think going back and letting the writing just sort of let the words pour out.

You get that depth about, wait a minute, I wasn't doing this on my own. There were other participants. you know, I just was really struck by kind of the poignancy in your poet soul that comes through when you describe, you know, sort of the fantastical thinking about life and death and forests and, you know, all the imagery and.

you know, your father's death, your grandma Violet's death, there's that urgency, but death is a part of every day. But I thought how you treated that, was just so beautifully done because you painted terrific images that I think readers will really enjoy about.

overcoming and persevering and what you said about resilience because those misfortunate things are there but it is how you frame them and what you do with them, right? So beautifully done.

Michele Lee Sefton (22:22)

Thank you.

Wynne Leon (22:25)

Sorry, and we know that it comes through to the reader because I'm going to read a sentence from your Kirkus review, last sentence. A harrowing yet beautifully rendered chronicle of loss, self-destruction, and the long road to self-acceptance. So we know that self-acceptance comes through. mean, that must have been a great review to read and get.

Vicki Atkinson (22:33)

Good. Yeah.

Michele Lee Sefton (22:46)

Ciao.

Yeah, the reviews have been affirming, you know, that I am on the right path of sharing the story. you know, another important element that also might be helpful for readers who are looking at writing a story from experiences based on their past is that early on, I made the decision to fictionalize the story.

And that really allowed me to just have creative expression and let the story flow, ~ which offered healing to myself. ~ I hope that comes through to the readers as well.

Vicki Atkinson (23:41)

Yeah, it's a whole genre that Wynne and I have encountered recently. Wynne tell me if I've got this right. But it's autobiographical fiction, auto fiction that I think what you just described, Michele, it provides a comfy platform for people to do the necessary storytelling and writing for wellness. But it also gives a little liberty to also tell a thoughtful story. Wow.

Wow.

Michele Lee Sefton (24:12)

I have seen that genre. Yeah. That does, that is fitting.

Wynne Leon (24:18)

So you've published other books, novella, some poetry books. What else is on your creative radar after you birth this baby?

Vicki Atkinson (24:19)

Yeah.

Michele Lee Sefton (24:30)

after I birth this baby. I'm going to revisit my two novellas. ~ side note about those, I started writing those, they were, I was working on Jade's Broken Bridge. the first novella I wrote, Her Coastal Cottage, where Truth and Love Rise, it was,

an opportunity for me to ~ move into like lighter writing, romantic writing, and in contrast to Jade, which there is some romance in Jade, but it's definitely not a romance, you know, it doesn't fall into that category. ~ And then my second novella last year, Honeysuckle Heats. And but what I discovered is in writing those is that

It really was a wonderful exploration of relationships and woman empowerment. And like ~ so often in my writing, it also highlights the mystery of the natural world as well. And so I've learned a lot in writing and soon to be releasing Jade's Broken Bridge. So with that in mind,

I'm revisiting my two novellas next year. And they will have a new look and some story additions. And I'm going to give them more of the attention I think they deserve as far as getting the stories to the readers. they will both be republished under my imprint, Tumbleweed Spirit Press. I have a...

My third novella is in progress and I'll be publishing that in 2027. Wow. It's hard to believe that's just two years away, isn't it? And then later next year, I will be releasing a poetry and photography collection that I'm eager to talk about because I feel passionately about this subject.

But I'm gonna just keep that under wraps for now.

Vicki Atkinson (26:50)

I'll be at our

Wynne Leon (26:53)

We'll about it on the next one.

Michele Lee Sefton (26:54)

I am so excited to talk about it because there is a story behind it. I will share that it will be of photographs I took over a period of a couple years and poetry, short poetry. And it does have to do with nature.

Vicki Atkinson (27:16)

Well, and we didn't really bring this up, but there are so many rich descriptions in Jade's Broken Bridge about the natural world, and especially the treatment about forests and trees and all of that. It's just very evocative. But your poet and soul and your visual, art sense and photography, comes through in your writing. It definitely does.

Michele Lee Sefton (27:42)

Thank you. I think it helps me. It's the way I write and process things, but with writing, I go into, well, we know the term flow, you know, when you find flow. And for me, my writing is putting myself into that scene completely and wholeheartedly. And so that's what shows up.

and you know from what I see and hear and the natural world is an important part of that.

Vicki Atkinson (28:17)

Yeah, good immersive writing. Like that.

Michele Lee Sefton (28:22)

We are.

Wynne Leon (28:23)

So

excited for you and your release of Jade's Broken Bridge and all that you have on your radar. So thank you so much.

Michele Lee Sefton (28:29)  
you so

much. It's absolute pleasure. Thank you.

Vicki Atkinson (28:31)  
It was a pleasure. ~ my gosh.

Wynne Leon (28:35)  
Thank you.

Thank you for listening. Our music is composed for Sharing the Heart of the Matter by the exquisitely talented duo of Jack Canfora and Rob Koenig For show notes and more great inspiration, please visit our site at [SharingTheHeartOfTheMatter.com](http://SharingTheHeartOfTheMatter.com).

Michele Lee Sefton (28:58)  
you ~