



An inspiring interview with author Arlene O 'Neil on life as a "crippled" child (the term she heard over and over during her youth), her book Broken Spokes, and how she learned to face her hardships to triumph over tragedy.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Insider note: After Arlene told Debra and I about saying the word “basically” over and over in an interview, we couldn’t resist teasing her a bit when we came on air. That is why you will read the word “basically” several times.

Kim: Well Debra are you there?

Debra: I am here

Kim: Hallelujah, the party is about basically to begin.

Debra: Yes, basically it is.

Kim: (laughing) So, we are in our second month in Reader’s Rockin’ Radio, and things are really starting to heat up over here. I am getting emails and requests, and so that is pretty fun. I have never received fan mail before. (laughing)

Debra: Hey

Kim: I know. So remember all you authors and readers out there in internet radio land, you can stay connected with Reader’s Rockin’ Radio by signing up for the Master Koda newsletter. You will find the sign up form on www.masterkoda.com go to the website there is a contact page (newsletter page), and just fill that out. In the newsletter we will always keep you informed of what will be going on. We have got some exciting things happening in the next couple of months. So, um, that is basically what I have for tonight, and ...

Debra: Yes, if you are enjoying our show you can look under the flashing banner and you will find a tweet button and a like button. You can do one or both. Personally I do both.

Kim: Nice.

Debra: Yes.

Kim: Um, we are our own fan club this week.

(laughing)

Debra: That's right.

Kim: You might also want to share our show with your friends because, there is a little button at the bottom of the flashing pictures, you can click that share button and the reason why you would probably want to do that is we are going to be having a couple big giveaways coming up, probably going to do one next week for our Christmas show. I would love to be able to give one of our faithful listeners an early Christmas present. So that is about it for the announcements.

Hey, Debra who do we have joining us this week?

Debra: Well, we have an exciting guest, her name is Arlene O'Neil, and I have had the honor of editing her book "Broken Spokes" which is absolutely fantastic. It is an amazing true story that I think everybody should pick up and buy for Christmas gifts, and buy for themselves. Lovely book.

Kim: So, Arlene are you out there in the studio wandering about?

Arlene: Good evening Debra, and good evening Kim. It is nice to be here.

Debra: Hello

Kim: Hi, we are just really happy to have you here. I have recently finished reading your book, and I will agree with Debra it's just a fantastic read. You are a very gifted writer and I would encourage our listeners to pick up a copy of "Broken Spokes" by Arlene O'Neil. It's very heartfelt and just incredibly well written.

Arlene, I am interested to know how you came to write this book. You know, what prompted you to write the book, also I am sure that everyone out there is wondering " what does the title of the book mean?"

So, can you go into those things for us.

Arlene: Sure, "Broken Spokes" stands for broken bones, broken bike, and broken spirit. I had an accident as a child, and it put me in a hospital. This is back in the 50's. It was called Newington Crippled Children's Home, and the messages while I was spending 18 months in bed in a hospital, and a year on crutches afterwards, although well-meaning were extremely negative messages. Such as "don't cry you will upset your grandparents", ah "don't cry you will upset your parents", "don't be a cry baby". I lived in a ward with 32 other children, and political correctness had not made the forefront at the time.

These negative messages followed me through most of my adult life, and I didn't learn to cry till I was about 32 years old. The reason I wrote the book, one of the main reasons I wrote the book, was be careful what you say to people who are having a rough time, whether they be a child or an adult, because these messages stay with them throughout their life. It affects who they become. They become people they would not have become had they not been in that situation.

Kim: Well that is profound. I just want to back up. You mentioned the name of the hospital and it just causes chills to go up and down my spine, because my mother was an administrator of a rehabilitation hospital and a portion was a convalescent hospital. So I was raised in an atmosphere of care. Learning to care and learning to accept all human beings right exactly where they were at. It was very important to my mother that I learned that at an early age, and so the children there were brought to our home and they became my good friends. My mother would bring them home she felt it was very important for them to have a home atmosphere while they were so far away from their own homes... Please, just go back and say the name of that hospital for our audience one more time. Because folks, this is unbelievable that something would even be named this.

Arlene: Well it was originally named The Home for the Incurables and then it was changed to Newington Crippled Children's Home, and I believe now it is called Connecticut Children's Center or something like that. But the conformation of crippled in 1959 definitely held a disparaging cogitation. I was known as that crippled child, and I was referred to as the crippled kid, and this was while I was in the hospital, um, my parents did get to take me out occasionally and one instance in the book I refer to is being at an amusement park with my parents and some kids walking by and going "wow, isn't that cool they let that crippled kid on the ride". So being labeled crippled say back in 1959, ah then getting out and going to school for one year on crutches, I didn't fit. I didn't fit in. I had a special spot in the playground that I had to stay in so that I wouldn't get hurt. Which set me aside from everyone else, and I think that is what made me choose one of two paths in life; to be invisible or to become an overachiever.

I could never find my middle ground in life where I fit in. It was very difficult to fit in because I didn't know where I fit.

Debra: Is there any special way that you tried to deal with being different? I know that there were incidents about a swimming pool that were really um, troublesome for you. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that, and how you dealt with being different from everyone else? What did you do internally, for instance, that helped you vanish.

Arlene: Basically I hid. I hid inside myself. I hid my emotions. I hid my feelings, and I always thought it was my responsibility to make everyone else happy. So, they wouldn't focus on my disability. If someone got upset because of the condition I was in I would joke my way out of it to make them laugh, to take the sadness of the situation away. Most of my life that is how I dealt with other people having problems is I have taken it upon myself to take away the problem or to deal with the problem through humor so that everyone was happy. It seemed to be my life's ambition to make other people happy, and I believe it is a direct result from the messages I got as a child was that everyone felt sorry for me, and I couldn't handle that. I couldn't handle that guilt. So, I turned that guilt around to make sure that everyone else

was happy. My thing was that I was the one who was miserable, and yet I still wore the mask. I still wore the smile. I could still change the atmosphere if my parents were down about having to leave me in a hospital on Christmas Eve. I could still joke about it so that they were laughing when they walked out the door. I felt even at 6 years old that was my responsibility.

That has carried on with me into my adulthood. I am still working on getting rid of that feeling that I am responsible for everyone else's happiness. I am still trying to discard that. It takes a long time and it is very hard to change these messages from childhood. I found recently since writing the book that if I find myself associated with people who are not non-complimentary even in a joking way, because if it is a joke both of us should be laughing, it would start to hurt. I learned to delete these people from my life. Because, they still hurt. I have made a conscious choice not to be with people who hurt me. That is one of the things...

Kim: Well, I just want to interject. I mean that is healthy, you have come to a healthy place with that. I mean it is healthy to choose to be with people who uplift you and people that you know have a more positive attitude. So, for me, personally, I feel that that is something that you have come to that is healthy and that is important. You know you are learning those boundaries. I don't think there is anything wrong with saying "I need to move away from this relationship" if it is a hurtful relationship.

Arlene: It took me years, years to be able to do that. To be able to finally look at a relationship or a friendship and realize that um, I was constantly getting hurt by it; to make a decision to walk away from it.

Debra: Hmm mm. Yeah, that is an important lesson to learn in life, and um, do you think that some of the things that you went through in childhood helped you get to that place today, because it is a continuing journey. The broken child is always the broken child just hopefully gets some mending done as we get older. Moving on to something better and healthier.

Arlene: Yeah, we do mend a little along the way and in writing the book I managed some. I am still not complete. I know I still have a lot of work to do. I still have a lot of negative messages left from childhood that I still need to get rid of. But, at least being aware of them, and writing them out, I became aware of them, and I became aware of why I am like I am. You know trying to change that...

Kim: That brings up something that I was thinking about earlier today when I was pondering your book and our interview this evening, and that is your choice to write about your journey. It is a well known form of healing that they use in therapy and so it is interesting that you brought that up. That through your writing you were finding some healing during that period of time. So, I just wanted to interject that I find that really interesting that you did that intuitively. No one told you to. No one said "why don't you try this and it might help you". You just did it intuitively, and then this evening you are saying that it has helped in mending in certain ways.

Arlene: It has, and as I say it took a lot out of me emotionally to go back that far in the past. To recall all those incidents and to relive them, but I think to in many senses it was euphoric. Because, I realized that a lot of what happened wasn't my fault, and it was not the direct fault of those who tolled out the negative messages on a regular bases. Like the doctors, the nurses, the hospitals as well as intentioned as they were, family, friends, like I said the best of intentions they had unfortunately heard by a 6 year old mind, were turned completely around.

Kim: You know that is a real important message for people that work with children or have a family of their own - and that is that there are things as adults we feel are pretty straight forward messages, children interpret very differently, and you know you are an example of that. You had a lot of that as a kid. One topic in your book touches on the death of your husband, when your son was just a tiny boy, and the grieving process involved there, could you touch on that a little bit? I know personally that I have got people around me that deal with the grieving process, and right now it is a real personal issue for me and several people with my family. So, could you touch on that a bit?

Arlene: It was a very difficult time in my life as it was. Unfortunately by then I was disabled. I had a total hip replacement, because of this accident in 1978. I got married in 1979 and had my son in 1981 and my husband passed away in 1985. My son was 4 ½ years old.

I still did not learn, I still didn't know how to cry. I ended up in therapy for 2 years, and so did my son, trying to deal with the death of my husband and his father. I found myself disabled, single parent, to a 4 ½ year old holy terror. My son was definitely not a day at the beach to raise, and he will be the first one to admit it. Hyperactive, attention deficit disorder; I was on speed dial with the schools, and doing it basically alone. I had my brother help some, my family helped some, but when it came right down to it I was a 24 hour caretaker. Feeling like my own issues of grief or trying to, dealing with my son who had no one but me, it was probably the hardest time in my life, and in the book I found that very difficult to write about. I blocked out a lot of it.

I didn't realize it until I wrote the book. Then I realized that there were things that I could not recall.

Debra: I got to tell you that going on the journey with you, as your writing partner, and that doesn't mean I wrote the book with her, she reads things that I write and I read things that she writes, to catch those little gremlins that always pop into a book when you are writing; but to go on that journey with you is exciting because I remember the epiphany, I remember the memories coming back, I remember all of that and it was really, when I use the word exciting I don't mean joyous excitement, I mean I was constantly, my awareness was heightened because every time I read something I would go "oh, boy I bet this was something that really got her stirred up". I remember all of that, and when a lot of these things unblocked for you, and we would talk on the phone for hours about it.

Arlene: Most of it was painful, because it was recalling all of these memories.

Debra: Yeah

Arlene: But it was also healing. At a point as my son grew, and got out on his own, um, he joined the army. For me that was one of the proudest moments of my life. I realized that I did a good job as a parent. I wasn't the parent that I thought I was. I thought I was a horrible single parent. I think most single parents do, but to find out that my son learned enough from me during those years, to join the service was the crowning moment to me in my life. Another moment was I had um, a dog that delivered 13 puppies and I chose to keep the non-breathing, handicapped, blind dog. Now he had in a little bit become my heart, and it was through him that I learned the balance in life. Watching him he wasn't handicapped. He didn't see himself as handicapped. He didn't know he couldn't see. He didn't know that he was any different than any other dog, and I watched him with his balance in his life. He wasn't invisible and he wasn't an overachiever. He did go on to become an ambassador for the blind and handicapped animals. He went on to become a therapy dog for the Connecticut Humane Society, and as I watched him overcome his obstacles I overcame mine.

Kim: Oh that is fantastic! That is the dog that you talk about in your book, his name is Little Bit, isn't that correct?

Arlene: Yes and I lost the dog 4 years ago and I still will never get over that pain that pain is still with me every day.

Debra: And can you tell everyone what breed of dog he was?

Arlene: He was a 100 pound black lab, um, nothing but 100 pounds of love.

Debra: Yep

Kim: that is a good sized lab

Arlene: But he didn't know he was 100 pounds he thought he was a lap puppy. That is where he spent his life, and we used to get a lot of joy out of going to nursing homes. I would bring him to nursing homes for people who didn't have their animals with them anymore, and it brought a lot of joy to both of us. He loved his job. He knew the minute he put his jacket on he was going to work. He had no formal training for this, it just came natural for him. That was his...

Kim: You know I think that is such an important part of your book, you speak about coming full circle and going back to nursing homes and places like that to offer a little bit of joy and you talked about that being on the other side of the hospital bed. I just think that is such an important message for people to realize you know that life is a full circle. Things do come around.

Arlene: And the view from that hospital bed is so different from both sides.

Debra: hmm mm.

Kim: Absolutely

Arlene: Being there as a child and then going back as an adult with this dog who amazed everyone. He picked up on things that no one else saw. Um, he went to the people that needed the comfort the most.

It was instinctual for him. Watching him it enriched my life so much to know that he brought such joy to other people. I think that this is something that is important in therapy and in hospitals across the United States, is that if I know I am hospitalized for something for any length of time I would like a dog there because it is an important part of my life.

Kim: For sure, and animals are so very healing, very very healing. Listen Arlene we are really getting close to the end of our show and we have just a couple more questions that we would like to ask. So I don't mean to hurry it, but we only have a half hour for this show, and it is really important for me for folks to get your information and that kind of thing. Deb, do you have a question for her.

Debra: Yes, um, what I would like to know is what your life, I know you moved from Connecticut to South Carolina, so I would like to know what is going on today, and what message you would like readers to take away from reading "Broken Spokes"?

Arlene: Well life right now is I live on a small farm. I have five goats, two steer, and two dogs. I moved to South Carolina for the warmer weather and the peace and quiet to continue working on my second book. Um, which is going to deal with army life through my eyes of being an army parent for 10 years.

Debra: Yes

Arlene: And I hope it will serve as a guideline for other parents. The messages from "Broken Spokes" as I said earlier is be careful what you say because the messages are heard totally different than intended, and people can carry them through life with them. To also adopt a handicapped animal, because they can give you so much more, they offer you so much more than you give them. It is hard to change the messages in your head writing them down helped me. Possibly listening to my story, reading my story will empower you to write down your messages and be able to discard them along the way. A lot of people stated that my book touched them on a personal level, because they went through a similar thing, and somehow knowing that I survived they could.

Kim: You know that is something that I would like to touch on just for a second. You mentioned that people are touched by your book because they might have gone through something similar. And more universal than that with your book is folks may have gone through different experiences but you are such a talent at describing what was going on inside of that little child that that it will touch every human. They have had the same feelings whether their experience was completely different or not, those feelings are universal. Your book was just so alive when I read it, it touched me in a very deep and profound way.

I wanted to interject that as a reader, I personally would like everyone in my family to read this book because I feel that it is that important that they learn these messages. Um, we only have a couple minutes left Arlene; I want to make sure that we let our audience know where they can get your book. The title is "Broken Spokes" the author is Arlene O'Neil, and where can they purchase your book?

Arlene: The book is available at Amazon.com, Barnesandnoble.com, and through my publisher Sagabooks.net

Arlene: And you can order it at any bookstore.

Debra: You can also purchase it through Amazon's Kindle as well.

Arlene: Kindle, Nook and any bookstore.

Kim: I see, ok. Perfect. Wonderful. I just want you to know Arlene that your book blessed me. It really touched my life and it blessed me. It is such a profound reminder for us to make sure that we are careful with our words and careful with other human beings that are going through pain, or those that have lost someone, or those who are going through emotional pain of some kind. You know it isn't our place to judge. It is not our place to be that person with the hard fist, but hopefully humans will get the message through your book to reach out in kindness and love.

Arlene: I would hope so, because it seems that I find more joy in talking to a former Vietnam Vet who is having a rough day, and I found him online, and I will talk to him for an hour, and I get so much more out of that or helping my 71 year old neighbor mow his lawn, because he can't do it, or helping to send 1,000 Christmas presents to my son's unit.

Kim: Oh, and that's another radio show right in itself.

Debra: Yes, she does that every year.

Kim: I would like to have you back for you to talk about that, but right now we have 30 seconds till the end of the show. Thank you so much Arlene, thank you Debra for being with us, thank you listening audience and we will see you next Wednesday 6:30 est., 5:30 cst., 4:30 mst, and 3:30 pst.

Have a wonderful night.

Arlene: And thank you for having me.

(OUTRO MUSIC)

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<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/readersrockinradio>

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