

[00:00:00.940] - Wynne Leon

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter Podcast, where we bring you talented creatives who inspire you to reach your next level of personal growth. I'm Wynne Leon, and in this episode, I'm with my co-host, Dr. Vicki Atkinson, and we are back with the amazing blogger and author, Stuart Perkins. We revisit a couple of Stuart's recent pieces that highlight the people who help us and inspire us to stay steady. Stuart writes so beautifully, period. He hooks us and we get to come along for the ride. In this case, about the moments of doubt and characters that help us to hold on, the people that make us want to be there for others when life feels unsteady. In his essay, Hand on the Plow, his coworker, Ms. Wade, was that influence. The grounded older woman who counseled Stuart as a new employee to exhibit determination in the wake of a mistake. Stuart tells us why she was so credible and why the memory of her stuck with him for decades after they worked together. We also chat about Stuart's recent piece that was published in the local scoop magazine because Granddaddy liked to fish. His family roots are so strong, whether with Nanny on the farm or with Granddaddy on Chesapeake Bay.

[00:01:28.470] - Wynne Leon

No wonder that Stuart can capture the feeling of family so well in his writing because Stuart knows how to capture the hilarious of family and being together so well. He tells us the secret of family traditions and togetherness are how they are born of balance, the long view, and a lot of laughter. Please join us for this great episode on staying steady in moments of doubt and also in The Long View of family and tradition. We know you'll love it. On a programming note, this is the last episode of 2023. We'll see you in 2024. Happy holidays. Hey, Stuart.

[00:02:24.680] - Stuart Perkins

Hey, Wynne. How are you?

[00:02:26.520] - Wynne Leon

Good. Vicki and I are so delighted to have you back on the podcast. We love your stories and your wisdom. You recently republished a post entitled Hand on the Plow, an honor of long ago colleague's death. Can you read it for us?

[00:02:46.610] - Stuart Perkins

Sure, I'd be happy to do that. I reposted this. As you said, I first wrote this back when the pandemic first began and we were all in doubt of what was going on, what it was, when it would end, and that thing. That's what prompted me to remember these words from an old colleague. It's called, Hand on the plow. I watched the morning news, but turned away as hopelessness washed over me while they reported infection rates and death toll. Isolation was helping to end this nightmare, so they said, but for many of us, it seemed an exercise in futility. When a reporter stressed the importance of perseverance, even when we doubted, an old memory crossed my mind of a time when I was unsure of my own next steps. Nope, Ms.

Sugarhead. Here's what you're going to do. She put her arm around my shoulder. Keep your hand on the plow and hold on. I understood the metaphor. Don't dismay was her message. I should simply continue what I've been doing. It was the 1980s, and I was a 20-something kid working a part-time retail job. Ms. Wade was an older African-American woman who had worked there full-time for a number of years.

[00:03:53.680] - Stuart Perkins

She showed me around, trained me, and a couple of weeks into the job was already my mentor and friend. New in my position, one day I rang up a sale incorrectly. Technology not being then what it is today, that wasn't hard to do. My mistake, which was realized later, cost the store less than \$20, but that was serious stuff. For an entire tense week, I came to work expecting to be fired. During that time, Ms. Wade listened to my worries, but smiled and encouraged me to keep my chin up and just keep doing what I was doing. I thought maybe I should quit. You can't quit when things seem hopeless. That's exactly when you don't quit. Ms. Wade looked at me and put her hand on her hip. Just hold on, I told you. Keep your hand on the plow and hold on. I continued whining, bothered by the embarrassing thought of having to explain to everyone why I had been fired. Not to mention I'd have to find another job. The situation seemed gloomy, and I told her so. Ms. Wade patiently repeated that I should keep going even through confusion and fear. It was okay that the outcome wasn't known.

[00:04:55.820] - Stuart Perkins

The point was to push on and take it day by day. So that's what I did. A few days later, I was informed, unceremoniously, the personnel chalked up my mistake to inexperience and a learning curve. Because I had continued working and demonstrated determination, they let it go. Wow. Just as Ms. Wade said, the best thing to do was carry on in spite of overwhelming bouts of apprehension. What a valuable lesson that good woman taught me. I turned back to the morning news, more reports of infections and deaths. So much uncertainty. When will this end? What can any of us do? I'm not the only person experiencing moments of confusion and worry. The entire world is swallowed up by these feelings as we wait for a resolution. For now, our responsibilities are to follow advice and keep at it even during moments of doubt. The especially during moments of doubt. A solution will eventually come. In the meantime, I can offer an answer to this mess, but thanks to Ms. Wade, I can offer a bit of advice. Keep your hand on the plow and hold on.

[00:05:59.220] - Wynne Leon

That is beautiful. I love the way in capturing that time right at the beginning of COVID when it was just everything was unknown, as you say, so well, and offering that piece of wisdom that she had for, especially in moments of doubt. She sounds like a perfect guide and mentor for a 20-something.

[00:06:23.590] - Stuart Perkins

She was. I started that job. I didn't know what I was doing or the culture of the workplace or any of that. She had a way of calming your nerves by just stating the obvious. Just do what you're here to do and then it'll all be okay.

[00:06:37.610] - Wynne Leon

Yeah. There's a lot of backbone in that.

[00:06:39.700] - Stuart Perkins

That's right.

[00:06:40.770] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. And, Stuart, when I read this, I had a little flashback of my own. I was the last person on the planet that should have been working around the same time in high school in a stereo store back in the days when we sold components, turntables and speakers and and amplifiers were separate and I should never have been there. I figured everything got sold in a set. I sold a turntable to someone and just handed off all the other stuff that I thought needed to go with it. There was someone who was like Ms. Wade with me also, who just said, you had no ill will. You weren't trying to sell something to a friend. But it was so funny. I had not thought about that for years. But those moments when we have someone who's so solid, and you and Wynne used this word steadfast to guide us, when they see us really crumbling on the inside, it means so, so much. That you, after that encounter and working with her, you didn't actually get to see her again, but then learned that she passed away. Is that right?

[00:07:53.670] - Stuart Perkins

That's right. We worked together maybe three years off and on because I was part-time and she was full-time. But not until that was in the '80s. We have a mutual friend who I kept up with Ms. Wade marginally over the years, but I didn't learn until June of this year that she had passed away.

[00:08:13.830] - Wynne Leon

Wow. When you learned of it, did you feel touched by her all over again?

[00:08:18.870] - Stuart Perkins

It made me remember all of the things I'd always talk to friends about and some other things I had forgotten about. She was a very funny woman. I come from a family of strong women, and she always reminded me of one of my aunts maybe, who was like an assistant. All of us kids at home had an assistant. You had your mother, but all of your aunts were her assistants. Ms. Wade was my assistant and guided me not just through that job, but through a lot of... We talked about a lot of things over the course of three years. It wasn't just about how to ring up this or ring up that. She was older than much

older than me and had a history and a life of her own, and she was willing to pass on the guidance and good words to help me when she saw that I need a little help.

[00:09:05.440] - Vicki Atkinson

Sometimes the best wisdom is the simplest. You've said when you break down what her advice was, it suits a lot of different circumstances and is applicable. But for her, it probably came from her family's roots, the very literal, stay steady, keep your hand on the plow, had an agrarian, probably horrific origin, going back to slaves and if we think about our country's history.

[00:09:37.210] - Stuart Perkins

That's right. As I said in my essay, she was an African-American woman, and I appreciated her words at the time because they made me think, Oh, I won't get fired. But it was probably 20 years later when it dawned on me why she said what she said, where the roots of her thoughts came from, and that guidance. And the fact that she was willing to share with me what she considered good old fashioned wisdom, and it was, made me feel even better.

[00:10:05.660] - Wynne Leon

Yeah. It speaks to almost, and you said this a second ago, that she saw you. She saw that you needed something. She was a person who reached out and touched people when she saw that they needed a.

[00:10:23.470] - Stuart Perkins

Little help.

[00:10:25.880] - Wynne Leon

Sometimes I think of kindness and generosity as big things, but one of the things that you often do in your stories is talk about the little ways that we need it.

[00:10:36.560] - Stuart Perkins

She probably never thought again about helping me through that week because she didn't do it for anything other than, Gosh, this poor little kid doesn't know what he's doing here. Let me just help him through this week. But yes, I like to write about these moments in life because we all have them. We all see them. We just don't all write about them maybe. But those are the powerful things, those little moments Right.

[00:11:02.540] - Vicki Atkinson

Definitely. Definitely. We'll praise to Edmonia Wade. Sing her praise.

[00:11:09.000] - Wynne Leon

Absolutely. May we all do a little bit of the same.

[00:11:13.290] - Wynne Leon

You.

[00:11:15.210] - Wynne Leon

Were recently published again in the local scoop magazine about your history on Chesapeake Bay. What struck Vicky and I about that is how much your family likes to be together. We just have had Thanksgiving as we record this. There's always jokes about, Oh, my gosh, I have to be with my family for holidays. But your family actually seems to like it. Both growing up near Nana and then also then on the Bay because of your granddaddy, and as you said, because granddaddy like to fish. So tell us, we want to know the secret of place and togetherness in your family.

[00:11:58.720] - Stuart Perkins

I don't know the secret, but I grew up, like you said, Nancy, growing up at home, I've said this before, I grew up in a very rural way because my grandparents had a farm and they gave each of their kids a piece of land. So we all grew up encircling my grandparents' farm. All of my friends were my cousins. I just didn't know it at the time. I was walked over by aunts and uncles and everyone. Because we all adored Nancy and she had so much power, she was a good woman. We enjoyed getting together. She was the glue. Granddaddy, he liked to fish. We had a good time at home as a family, and we had a good time on the bay as a family because of the two of them.

[00:12:44.370] - Wynne Leon

It's almost as funny, the parallel. We talked about Ms. Wade and we talked about nanny and we talked about Granddaddy, those strong personalities that lead by bringing us together.

[00:12:55.950] - Stuart Perkins

What I remember most about my grandmother, Ms. Wade too, they taught you things not by lecturing or giving you a lesson. It was by example. Just listen to let me help you out in this situation. It was no lecture, no lesson, no formal, anything. It was just they taught by example.

[00:13:15.300] - Vicki Atkinson

Well, and in the piece, Stuart, in the local scoop, there's a beautiful photo of your granddaddy that will link all of that in the show notes. But it's just so fun to see him and read the story. But it also struck Wynne

and I because it's, as you said, your nanny, Ms. Wade, your granddaddy, the power of traditions and honoring some of those rituals. But he also knew himself. That man, from what we read, he loved to fish. He was on a mission to fish, and he pulled the rest of the family in. You're continuing those traditions in your own way with your place, just a little down the water by the Bay. When and I joke that maybe your granddaddy liked to fish, but maybe because you're a granddad now, maybe one day it's granddaddy liked to write and tell stories. But as you think about all of that and creating those traditions and trying to keep those memories alive, how is all of that important to you as a beautiful human following and the legacy of those that came before you?

[00:14:32.460] - Stuart Perkins

Well, I did come from a big family who enjoy traditions, not just holiday traditions, any day traditions. We did all get together for no reason sometimes. We would make homemade ice cream on my grandmother as well, or somebody has a watermelon, come and eat it. We enjoyed the tradition. My grandfather did like to fish and all that started because of him. But I think he might not have known what was going to hit him once he started that, because everyone just said, Hey, that is a fun place. Let's go. This Thanksgiving was nice because I had that local scoop story out we were talking about, about my grandfather and my grandson was here. I took a picture. I got him to hold the magazine open to that article. I said, My grandson is holding on a magazine with an article about my grandfather, and my grandfather would never have ever thought that would happen.

[00:15:26.040] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, local celebrity. You write in your piece, family reunions are large gatherings: kids in the water, lawn chairs in the shade, and laughter in the air, relatives from far and wide end up sprinkled across the yard, the beach, and the deck, gathered together ultimately because granddaddy liked to fish. Oh, my gosh. Just drop the mic. I'm a happy girl. It's such a beautiful scene. It warms me all over.

[00:15:56.500] - Stuart Perkins

He may have thought he was going to have a private place to go and fish, but everyone fooled him.

[00:16:02.060] - Wynne Leon

Did he ever say, We have to be quiet in order to fish?

[00:16:07.710] - Stuart Perkins

No, I'm sure all he did was smile and say, Come on. That's how my family is.

[00:16:14.960] - Wynne Leon

Yeah. My four-year-old son tried fishing for the first time this summer, and he put the line into the water, he pulled it out. He did it like three times, and he's like, Where's the fish? I was like, Well, it's called fishing. It's not called catching.

[00:16:36.310] - Stuart Perkins

We tried to teach my grandson to fish, or his father did while they were there. My daughter, his mother, she was worried about... He's only five. She was worried about him having a fishing pole with a hook in it. My son-in-law said, Oh, don't worry. That's just a rubber fish tied onto the string. She looked at me. She said, You mean he'll never catch a fish? I said, He'll never catch a fish. But he's learning the process. That's the first step.

[00:17:01.020] - Wynne Leon

Yeah, there's a lot of patience in the process. That's a great segue into both of these pieces that speak to steadiness. I mean, this way to keep it the course and the family, cottage is a retreat of carefree happiness because you've kept steady with the traditions. Is that the key to serving the ups and downs in life?

[00:17:29.600] - Stuart Perkins

Well, it's one I use. I don't know that it's the key, but so often we freak out or we have to hurry or this is not working or that's not working. And sometimes you just have to hold on, be still. Things will, they'll work out. And it's yes, you have to take baby steps to get out of these holes, but don't freak if it doesn't happen tomorrow. Just hold on. And we've all been in low points. I've been in my. But you get one step at a time you get out of that stuff. But you can't let the big picture bog you down. Just hold on and get out of it.

[00:18:10.180] - Vicki Atkinson

I think people sometimes, in my experience, miss that opportunity to figure out where do they find renewal. It seems like your family, Stuart, has always found comfort in the water of the Bay. It's part of you all. In some people go to beaches and mountains or need water. But for you and your family, you're stoking the fire, all those traditions to continue forward. I love the story of taking the photo. You're with a magazine with your grandad in it. But you can't imagine your happy place being anywhere but the Bay.

[00:18:51.460] - Stuart Perkins

No, it's always been mine. Like I said, we're so big on traditions, and the Bay has always been a giant percentage of those traditions. The traditions are what is falling back on good old family stuff that's unknown and is comforting and makes you feel secure. Those thoughts alone can help you get through a rough time. Traditions, the Bay feeds into that tradition, which feeds into helping me keep my balance anyway.

[00:19:21.020] - Wynne Leon

Yeah, the Longview provided my family, providing that balance. That's beautiful.

[00:19:29.640] - Vicki Atkinson

Well, and just coming off of Thanksgiving, we were joking before when hit record that so much of that bringing families together is the fun and the revelry around family food and dishes that everyone expects and being together to celebrate and all of that matters. We just finished Thanksgiving, but since we spoke to you last, did you have some fun barbecues? I'm not a Bay person, but I know that there's some shellfish stuff going on. Did you have fun doing all of that over the summer?

[00:20:07.220] - Stuart Perkins

Yeah, there's always food. There was a lot of that here at the Bay. But yeah, we just enjoyed the summer and the water and the newness of having this place. We just got it last year. We've just had a good time settling in and waiting for our family to come and friends to come next year. It's pretty all the time, but the Bay is a great place in the summer. Wonderful.

[00:20:32.820] - Vicki Atkinson

Well, then what is ahead for holiday time? Does everyone come back around one more time before everything is completely a frozen tundra?

[00:20:40.550] - Stuart Perkins

No, they won't be here for Christmas. They were here for Thanks... Both of my kids live in other states, so they have other things they're going to be doing for Christmas, but they were here for Thanksgiving. It was great. Now we're just recuperating from that, but they'll be back in the summer.

[00:20:56.650] - Wynne Leon

Awesome. Well, beautiful. I think we're starting a tradition where we get to have you on a few times a year. Can we call it a tradition yet?

[00:21:08.830] - Stuart Perkins

Absolutely.

[00:21:10.740] - Wynne Leon

It's.

[00:21:11.920] - Wynne Leon

A tradition of storytelling sitting around the microphone.

[00:21:16.580] - Stuart Perkins

That's a good one.

[00:21:17.840] - Wynne Leon

It is. It's a pretty good one. And we love having your time and your attention. And thank you.

[00:21:23.370] - Stuart Perkins

Well, thank you. I always love talking to you guys.

[00:21:26.060] - Vicki Atkinson

Well, we love it too, because you give us that dose of what matters most. And it's so easy for you because it just comes out of you. But we're grateful so are our listeners. So thank you so much, Stuart.

[00:21:38.100] - Stuart Perkins

No, thank you. I appreciate being invited back.

[00:21:41.860] - Wynne Leon

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