Anthea:

Welcome to Sideshow on 2RPH. This is Anthea Williams. And today I have with me, Jasper Peach. Jasper Peach is a nonbinary trans and disabled writer, who lives on Dja Dja Wurrung Country in Victoria. Their work is often radically personal and their latest book is, You'll Be a Wonderful Parent: Advice and Encouragement for Rainbow Families of All Kinds. Jasper, thanks so much for joining us today.

Jasper:

Uh, thanks for having me. It's lovely to chat with you.

Anthea:

So, Jasper, the first article of yours that I read or that I realized was yours when I read it was in The Guardian and it was titled School Sport was a Hellscape For Me.

Jasper:

(laughs) Yeah.

Anthea:

I could totally relate.

Jasper:

Lots of people could. Yeah. (laughs) That was quite a, um, a zeitgeist piece that I stumbled across, um, creating. Yeah.

Anthea:

Really was. And so, I guess my first question, how do you decide what you're gonna write about?

Jasper:

Hmm. Um, when I've got a bee in my bonnet, I have to write about it. Um, when I'm curious about something or I need to understand, um, why things are the way they are and, and then what ways I would prefer it to be different and is that my bias, would it be better? How can I affect positive change? Um, sometimes it's just all on the page. Sometimes it's activism, sometimes it's other stuff. But, um, it's just living my life, which is inherently politicized-

Anthea:

Yeah.

Jasper:

... just simply because of who I am. Um, and observing that through a neurodivergent and disabled lens, it, it, you know, there's a lot of synapses firing in there all the time about being othered, being different, being welcome, being, um, happy. All of these things sort of, um, influence what comes out of me. And sometimes it just explodes out. I, I think with that sports piece, um, it was coming through an experience I had of, of learning how to be strong for the first time in my body and being respected and, and held and guided through that process by a really trustworthy person, Jessie, my physio.

Um, and how... I don't know, it felt kind of sad to me that it took 40 years to get to a place where that was possible. Um, and so, what I often do is go to Twitter and say, "Hey, what do you guys think about this subject in terms of your own lives?" And that tweet really struck a nerve with thousands of people, thousands upon thousands of people. So, what I'd done was I sort of observed all these responses coming up and went, "Oh, okay." And I just sat at my desk and I think I wrote 5,000 words. Um, I pitched to The Guardian and then they asked me for a completely different thing to what I had written, (laughs) which is often the case.

Um, so when I, when I take, um, publishing workshops or when I deliver publishing workshops, I, I often cite that example because people say, "Should I write first or pitch first?" Um, and always... like write your notes and... but always be aware that it, it might not have that final form if you are publishing it through an external place, I guess.

Anthea:

Hmm.

Jasper:

Yeah.

Anthea:

Yeah, I think that's, I think that's really, really wise. You share a lot of your own stories, but you also share stories from your friends and communities. And I wanted to find out how do you decide what you're going to share and how do you decide which friends' stories you're going to share. Are people terrified of coming to your house for a dinner party in case they end up in a book?

Jasper:

(laughs) Um, no one's scared yet. But we have had a lot of people say, "Oh, I always cry when I come to your house." (laughing) That's a thing that often happens, I think because my wife and I are, are both big talkers and listeners more importantly. Um, and sometimes we ask questions of people sitting in front of us that, that open up floodgates and open up a, a deeper understanding for that, that person or, or those people. Um, so mainly, people are afraid of all the feelings they'll feel. (laughs) But, but often they come over because that's what they need as well. And they need a nonjudgmental space, um, where they can express where they're at and we can interact about that and see what comes up.

Um, but in terms of, of writing about, about friends and about people, I guess, I choose the things to write about that have a universal, um, application. Um, so, oh, look, there'll, there'll be something like my friend Rebecca from Twitter, um, is a single, disabled parent and has this no questions asked box of food for their kids' school friends to come over and eat from because there's not enough money in, in their houses to feed them. Um, and they don't have to talk about it and they don't have to ask, they can just come over. And so, it was really interesting to talk to Rebecca about that. But we're... as we got talking, you know, it's a nice story. Uh, it's this wonderful person helping others. But the deeper story is this is a massive government failing that the most vulnerable people are... they don't have enough. They just don't have enough to sustain the basic needs of life.

So yeah, exploration is always what, what gets me to the, the real story. You got to keep going. It's sort of like the soup. You got to skim the soup every now and then to get that really good rich flavor. Um, so it can be through conversation. It can be through writing. Um, but I'm always really impacted by other people. I'm very sensitive. And I feel things so deeply, and I think this is a very, um, common neurotypical trait, um, because, you know, we grow up feeling a bit out of place or like we're not quite doing it right, or we don't know why. And there's all these unspoken sort of channels of air that, that flow around us and squeeze or push or... and you end up just feeling a vibe and going "Oh, what's that about?" And you have to figure it out yourself because people don't directly talk about it unless you come to our house now because we just like talk about it.

Um, yeah, I think it's a very typical, typical experience for neurodi- neurodiverse people. And so, it's very deep, impactful feelings. Um, and when there's a feeling that's landed in my body, I need to process it. So, I write about it or I make audio about it or whatever, whatever it is. Yeah, I think I have, I have to keep pushing whatever the topic is and pushing around the page or until I reach a place of understanding or peace with it.

Anthea:

Hmm.

Jasper:

Um, because I think so much, so much of life before I really understood my brain was f- that feeling of displacement or that feeling of, "Oh, I don't, I don't really understand what's happening here. I feel like I'm getting it wrong." So, I don't want to buy into that anymore. I want to understand. So, that's why I guess I write about people and experiences and community.

Anthea:

Yeah, wonderful. Um, look a personal question that you don't have to answer. But can I ask how old were you when you f- realized that you had ADHD?

Jasper:

Last year.

Anthea:

Last year.

Jasper:

So, I am 42.

Anthea:

Okay.

Jasper:

Um, so, I was 41. Yeah. I... a lot of people have had that realization and that diagnosis in the last year or two. It's a, "Oh, this pandemic, man, it's such a, ugh, it's such a... it has had such a massive impact in so many unexpected ways." Every... everyone has been impacted by this, whether they believe in it or, or are, you know, taking precautions or, or not. Everyone's been impacted. Um, and for me it was, instead of filling all the minutes I had in my life with other people's stories and other people's opinions and trying to fit the mold, I had all this quietness in my own head and I could hear what came up. So, I understood my gender, finally, and then I understood my brain. And, and I love both of those parts of myself there. So much of what makes me who I am, but they're not at all that, that makes me who I am, but it's all part of it, you know? Yeah.

Anthea:

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I, I agree with you. I have a lot of people in my life who've had that experience as well. You know, I've known that I was dyslexic since I was a child and-

Jasper:

Hmm.

Anthea:

... my partner has known that he has ADHD since he was a child as well. But I've got members of my family and friends who only found out in the last couple of years. I think it's a very, very common story.

Jasper:

Mm-hmm. Can I just add to that as well, Anthea, that, that idea, um, of it happening in the last few years? I think it's really interesting to come to, to this place in adulthood and in my middle age, I don't know. (laughs) I'm 42, um, where understanding is one thing, but compassion is another.

Anthea:

Hmm.

Jasper:

And I'm, I'm finally, oh, it feels like such a relief. Like I'm finally able to view the way I operate compassionately. I've always tried to, regardless of understanding or not. But now, it's... I have a reference point and I have a place I can point to and go, "Oh, I feel the need to do this because of this." And that makes so much sense, and now I can understand it.

Anthea:

Hmm.

Jasper:

So, compassion is easier.

Anthea:

Yeah.

Jasper:

Yeah.

Anthea:

Yeah. That's really important. Can I ask what does inclusion and access mean to you?

Jasper:

It is the beginning of a conversation, I think. So, like every, every disabled person has a story about when they were told we are accessible and when they've experienced that they were definitely... that place was definitely not accessible. Um, and that's because a lot of people think that access and inclusion is putting a sticker on the door or having a toilet that is wide enough for a wheelchair to enter. Um, it's the beginning of a conversation. It's, it's not simple, it's not one dimensional. There are so many different types of access needs, and I could never hope to know all of them, but I'm always open and curious about them. I will never shut someone down about what they are telling me that they know about themselves. Um, and I think that's a... I'm not saying that I'm rare, but that's a rare thing that happens. Um, and it often only happens when people have lived experience of why it matters.

Anthea:

Yeah.

Jasper:

Um, so I would love it if the wider community would... we have the humility to say "I don't know everything. And I'm open to learning."

Anthea:

Hmm.

Jasper:

I'm open to hearing from people who know who they are and know what they need. Yeah.

Anthea:

I, um, read one of your articles where you spoke really beautifully about how the pandemic had taught us a lot about access and inclusion and how it was much broader than we thought it was.

Jasper:

Hmm. So much broader. Yeah. And we're all learning every day when no one knows everything.

Anthea:

No, no. Exactly.

Jasper:

Yeah.

Anthea:

So, your most recent book, tell us about You'll Be a Wonderful Parent. How did you get the inspiration to write this? And how has the book where... been received?

Jasper:

Well, this book is one in a series actually. So, the first book is called, You'll Be a Wonderful Dad. And it was written by a very dear friend of mine, Ailsa Wild. She's, um, an author. She does, um, children's books. She's done a book for adults. She's doing a graphic novel at the moment. She's phenomenal. Um, and she asked me if I would do a sensitivity read of her manuscript. Um, and this was after I... oh, God, it's a bit of a tangled story. But if we can sort of jump back and forth. (laughs)

Anthea:

Yeah.

Jasper:

Um, prior to that, I, I had been a marriage celebrant for 17 years. And then the pandemic came and my work was no longer enjoyable because my workplace wasn't safe for me as a, you know, compromise person. Um, so I needed to, you know, do the honorable thing and bow out because no one wants a grumpy celebrant at their wedding. (laughs) Um, so I deregistered myself and I thought, "What will I do? What will I do?" And I, I thought that I would leave that profession. It was really... it was dearly beloved to me and, and something that really filled my cups in all the ways. And then I got to think of the possibilities and I thought I really like writing and I whispered it to myself because I was so scared that I wasn't good enough to call myself that and that I didn't have what other people have. You know, it's that sense of displacement, um, whatever I thought people needed to do that.

And I asked in our parenting forum that I'm on, um, "I think I'm quite keen to get into writing. Does anyone have any advice for me?" And, and Ailsa offered me some mentoring and very generously said, "Send me some of your work and then we'll have a chat on Zoom." So, she was really encouraging. Um, she gave me some great advice and, and basically just said, "You've got a really distinct voice. Keep writing, keep going. That's all you need to do. And you'll find a really exquisite way forward." And that has definitely come to pass. It's what's happened.

Um, so flash forward a few months and Ailsa emailed me, "Hey, would you do a sensitivity read?" So I read this manuscript. She'd written a beautiful letter to her friend who was gonna become a father for the first time. It was like a 5,000-word manuscript. It's gonna be an illustrated book. And so I read, I read this manuscript, and then we had the meeting and I, I basically said... 'cause I'm pretty direct. I said, "Look, it's beautiful. It's a beautiful book. It's lovely. But there's nothing here for me. Um, this is a (laughs) a cisgender woman talking to a cisgender man. You're both heterosexuals, you're both having your families, um, the way the majority of people do. Um, my experience is vastly different to this. There's nothing wrong with that. But this book does not appeal to me as part of the LGBTQ community."

Um, and I said, as a throwaway line, at the end of the conversation, "Oh, you should tell your publisher, they should do a queer version." Anyway, she did, she did tell her publisher that. And, um, they got in touch with me, asked me for a writing sample. I sent it on and then they made me an offer. So, it was a very strange road into, (laughs) into the literary world. Um, one p- paved with generosity and saying yes to things that are interesting and having a go of things.

The book itself, it was kind of already in my head in a lot of ways with our first child. We didn't have the best experience, um, in the medical system in terms of in- inclusion and up-to-date language use and just the general situation. And I provided the hospital, the regional hospital that we went to with some very kindly worded, very clear feedback and, and basically said, "Look, I'm, I'm a really settled, confident person. I feel great in my skin. But when I walked out of that birthing class, I wondered if I was allowed to be a parent. I didn't know if there was a place for me. Um, and I just really feel worried about how people who don't have support around them and don't feel that confident would react in that si- situation. So I really encourage you to update your use of language, be more inclusive. You know, there were five people in the class. You could clearly say that there was only one mum and dad situation there. The other three people were not included in that. But yet you used the mum and dad language, um, and lots of other examples."

And they came back to me and that professor, they said, "Thank you for your feedback. Um, would you come and work for us and educate our birthing staff for a year?" So, I did that. That was a wonderful, wonderful job. And, and it wasn't, in any way, me working my finger at people and saying, "You must do this and you must do that." It was, it was a really beautiful conversation. It was the beginning of a conversation for them to keep going with, "Once I'd gone and look, I, I have heard from a local couple that unfortunately they're having the same problems that we had, which is really, really disappointing." But the, the words from that year that I, I spent with those people with those wonderful birthing staff, they were sort of just in, in my head.

And so, I basically just sat down and wrote that and reformatted it into this book, which is... well, it's been described as the Friendly Banana book 'cause it's bright yellow and it sits nicely in your hand and it's, it's not a big, thick book that you look at and go, "Oh, I can't focus on that" or "I'm not gonna be able to get through this" or "this is really dense." It's, it's not a how to. It's more like, it's more like a really, um, comforting chat with a friend, but it's in book form. It's just your friend putting their hand on your arm and say, "Hey, you can do this and there's lots of people who have done this and here's some of their stories and this is why you can do this. You may come across some of these situations. If you do, don't worry, you're not alone. And here's what you can do. Here's how you might feel. Here's, um, some things to, to bolster you when you, you feel that othering."

And it is beautifully illustrated as well by, um, another nonbinary parent who's in my local community in regional Victoria. And it was, it was such a joy to, I guess, to offer this resource to people where there had been no resource like it before. Um, it's the book I needed and it wasn't there. It's the... and I... the feedback I have received is relief. It's vulnerability. It's these tender offerings that come into my various inboxes and just say... it's people saying, "Oh, thank God, I found this book. Thank you for making it." I didn't know that I needed it, but I just needed to know that I belong and that I can do this. And now I know that.

Anthea:

Yeah, I am not surprised that you've had that response because it is a beautiful comforting book and it's full of love.

Jasper:

Oh, thank you.

Anthea:

And it's full of reassurance. But also, you said before that you were blunt. And I think there is some bluntness in that.

Jasper:

(laughs)

Anthea:

Like I love the moment where you say part of this parenting process is gonna be a process of self-identification and coming to terms with that. And I think it's really positive that you say you are going to go through this process.

Jasper:

Yeah, if we sugar coat everything and, and tell people who are in a minority group, you'll be right when they're in a, in a majority world. It, it's just not true. We need to understand what is going on. And, and if... I think a lot of it for me was constantly questioning, "Oh, why do I feel so bad after this interaction? They were being nice, weren't they?" But it's not always so simple as that. Sometimes it's... it can be intrusive. Sometimes, it can be judgmental. Sometimes, you just feel so exposed and politicized and like, you're not like everyone else. And that can feel really hard when you don't have enough sleep and you, you're trying to keep a little baby alive and figure out how they work and how you work as a family and what your family looks like. And, "Oh, gosh, it's, you know, it's like, it's like, uh, all these pedals just constantly unfurling." And the older the children get, the more pedals are opening. It's just... it doesn't stop. It's always pretty, pretty eye-opening.

Anthea:

Hmm.

Jasper:

Yeah.

Anthea:

Absolutely. You say that you, you're writing centers around displacing and dismantling misplaced shame. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Jasper:

Yeah. I think a lot of people feel shame that doesn't belong to them. Often if we've been on the receiving end of some not very nice behavior or relationship or attachment, the person doing that doesn't know or, or won't admit that they've done something that's wrong and then that shame just lands on us. And so, we feel like we need to be better or different or perfect. There's a lot of perfectionism as well that goes around. And the only way to get that shame out of your heart and out of your body and out of your connective tissue and out of all of it is to dismantle it. It's... you can't just cut off the flower. You've got to get it from the root, okay? You have to dismantle it and rebuild.

Um, so I think that's what I do with writing. And the most frequent response, response that I receive is I never thought about it like that. But now, it's all I can see and it's so clear and that's how it feels for me too. Like I, I sit down to work it out and then once I understand and look at it from, from a more compassionate lens, everything is easier and clearer.

Anthea:

Hmm. You've been so wonderful to chat to and I have so many more questions that I don't have to, like, ask in our half an hour slot.

Jasper:

Mm-hmm.

Anthea:

But I do want to ask you one thing. And that is, what do you feel that queer culture has taught you about crip culture or vice versa?

Jasper:

Oh, great question. Oh, let me think about that for a second. What has queer culture taught me about crip culture and vice versa? Hmm. Okay. Yeah. The... it's very similar. It is very similar. Um, the whole, the whole core of both of those groups and communities is really about there is nothing unacceptable about us, there is nothing wrong with us. We are these sacred divine beings who are just how we ought to be. And there is so much beauty in that. The only problem is when those outside of our communities don't see that and think we need to conform and that they don't need to contribute to balance and fairness. Um, yeah, it's really, really similar.

Anthea:

Yeah, I think so too.

Jasper:

Yeah.

Anthea:

Yeah. I think it [inaudible 00:24:13].

Jasper:

And it's a lot about becoming as well, you know? We become and become and become and we, we come out and we understand, and it's all really, really similar, similar feeling. My, um, my therapist describes me as a bit of a slingshot like I will... there'll be this, this part in my processing where I'm pulling the elastic back and it's really straining and that's when I'm really unhappy or I'm struggling or I'm anxious. But then once I let go, I sail forward and land exactly where I'm meant to be and sort of look around and blink and go, "Oh, that's why I felt so cranky for the last three hours or three days or three months or three years. Now I get it. Okay. Cool, clear. Next." (laughs) Yeah.

Anthea:

That's brilliant. Jasper, thanks so much for talking to us on Sideshow today.

Jasper:

Mm-hmm. Thanks for having me.

Anthea:

This is Anthea Williams on 2RPH with Sideshow. Hanna Cormack can't join us this month. But as always, they are on the hunt for crip art they can access or not access, as the case may be. Hanna has sent me their top picks for the month. It's June. So for Sydneysiders, it's Sydney Film Festival time this year, as well as showing the ever brilliant Screenability shorts. The festival has programmed three documentaries as part of their Screenability program.

Angel Applicant is a film I'm really keen to see. It won the grand jury award at South by Southwest. Ken August Meyer brings a unique perspective to the work of artist, Paul Klee, drawing parallels between their experiences of life-threatening illness. The film was shot over 10 years and it takes its name from one of Klee's last works. Other documentaries include The Tuba Thieves, where deaf filmmaker Alison O'Daniel's explores sound and its absence. And Is There Anybody Out There? in which Ella Glendining goes on a global search for others who share her experience of having a disability, so rare that there aren't any reliable statistics about it.

Hanna's other pick is the Sensory Sanctuary Festival in Castlemaine from June 24 to July 7. There are so many beautiful events that take part in this festival. So, I suggest you take a look at the website, which I've given in the show notes. But one of my favorites is the Build Your Own Sensory Pod Workshop run by Louise Cooper. And I can't help giving a plug to some works we've previously discussed. Past listeners will remember my conversations with the brilliant Dan Daw. Well, The Dan Daw Show is coming back to Australia. This time, he's touring to Melbourne to be part of the RISING Festival. The Dan Daw Show will be on at the Meat Market from June 15 to June 18. And I highly recommend you see it.

And my final recommendation is a little bit cheeky, one-woman-show, Pony by Eloise Snape, which I directed. It's still running at Griffin Theater. It's running at the Stables till the 17th of June and then traveling to the Canberra Theater Center from June 22nd. All links can be found in the show notes. To take us out this month, here's a small excerpt of Super Ego by Kazra.

Outro music:

(singing)