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Magic, Mischief, and Becoming Your Own Hero: A Q&A with Debbie Bishop

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Q. How did you come up with your title?

The main character’s name is Chloe Pillywiggin. A Pillywiggin is a forest fairy, slightly “wild,” and the name fit the character perfectly.

Q. When did you decide to write this story and why?

I originally created the first story as part of a video game designed to teach horticulture and gardening to kids—something similar in concept to Minecraft, before Minecraft came out.

As I developed the game, a story began to emerge. I wrote the first version as a children's book and hired Andy Park to illustrate the beautiful chapter book.

Later, I returned to the story, aged it up for teens and general fantasy readers, added characters and expanded the world. That became *Pillywiggin: The Lost Shadow Boys.*

Pillywiggin: Awakening is the second story, and the two were eventually brought together in *Pillywiggin: Awakening — The Complete Story Arc.*

Q. What is something you learned while writing Pillywiggin?

I learned that good stories tend to write themselves.

Parts of Pillywiggin were written 25 years apart, yet they came together naturally and beautifully, almost as if by magic.

I also learned that sometimes the characters know where the story is going before the writer does. I could outline everything, but then a character would make a choice I hadn't planned, and suddenly the story became better.

And fantasy works best when the emotions underneath it are completely human. You can have portals, strange creatures, battles and magic, but readers stay because they care about the people.

Q. If your book was turned into a film/TV show, who would you tap to play the lead(s)? Why?

I'm actually developing Pillywiggin as a film, and I do have people in mind to play some of the characters—but I'm keeping their names a secret for now.

Q. What's one secret about you that you'll share with the world?

I'm always working on something in my head. Even when I look like I'm doing absolutely nothing, there's a very good chance I'm writing a scene, fixing a story problem, designing something or inventing something.

So I may look quiet. I'm probably not.

Q. What is the core message you want to deliver to the world through your writing/books/stories?

You are more powerful than you have been led to believe.

A lot of my stories are about people discovering who they really are instead of accepting who the world has told them they are.

In Pillywiggin, there are two sides that have been taught to fear one another. Sometimes the most powerful—and the most feared—person is the one who can stand between those worlds and understand both.

Q. What makes Pillywiggin unputdownable?

Something is always being discovered.

The characters are learning who they are at the same time the reader is discovering what this world really is. There are secrets, friendships, betrayals, danger, humor, strange creatures and a much bigger mystery underneath everything.

Just when you think you understand whose side you're on, the story asks you to look again.

And the bonds between the characters make them compelling. You don't just want to know what happens to them. You want to be close to them. Q. **Tell us something about you that no one else knows.**

I'm not sure I have anything left that *no one* knows!

But one thing people may not realize is how much of my work begins with a feeling rather than a plot. I often know the emotional moment I want to reach before I know exactly how the characters are going to get there.

Q. What book has made you cry, and why?

Charlotte's Web.

Because underneath the story of a pig and a spider is something much bigger—friendship, loyalty, love, loss, and the fact that someone can change your life even if they aren't meant to stay in it forever.

That gets me every time.

Q. If you could give Pillywiggin to one person in the entire world to read, who would it be and why?

I would give it to someone who doesn't feel like they belong. Maybe a stray kid.

I'd want them to see that they matter—and to watch characters like them navigate their way out of a life they don't want and into a life they love.

Part 2 — Rapid Fire

Q. What's a body part that you wouldn't mind losing?

I prefer to keep all my body parts, thank you.

Q. What's your biggest screw-up in the kitchen?

The juices from a turkey overflowed into the oven, filling the entire house with smoke and setting off every alarm—just as the guests arrived for Thanksgiving dinner.

Perfect timing.

Q. What's the worst commercial you've recently seen?

Probably one I remembered perfectly while having absolutely no idea what they were selling.

But now I've forgotten all of it, so I suppose it really failed.

Q. What is the dumbest way you've been injured?

Tripping before my foot stepped on a mouse so I wouldn't squish it with bare feet in the middle of the night in my nightie and breaking my arm from the fall then having my arm stuck upright in a red cast with a white edge where my fingers stuck out so it the arm looked like a goose with a beak.

For a month people thought I had a puppet. Of course, that broke the ice. everyone laughed and were very friendly.

Q. What ridiculous thing has someone tricked you into doing or believing?

My dad convinced me he had a magic radio.

He could make the volume go up and down and change the station without touching it. My family was into metaphysics, light healing and things like that, so I didn't think much of it. I completely believed him.

What I didn't notice was that he snickered about it for decades.

I finally discovered the truth when I was 27: he had a remote control.

He absolutely loved the moment I found out. We had a great laugh about it.

Q. If you were given a one-minute ad slot during the Super Bowl, what would you fill it with?

A sixty-second movie.

No hard sell. I'd tell a story so good that millions of people stopped talking, stopped eating their nachos and watched until the last second.

Then I'd put one line on the screen:

Never underestimate the power of a story.

Q. What's the most useless talent you have?

I can spend two minutes moving something two pixels in a graphic design because I'm completely convinced those two pixels matter.**What would be on the gag reel of your life?**

I have always been the comic relief for the universe. They have scholars, the icons etc, I feel like they are watching me, maybe causing funny set ups I go through so they can laugh about it. There have been quite a few remarkable times.

9. **Where is the worst smelling place you've been?**

My stepmother's house when she cooked cabbage stew.

No contest.

10. **What's the weirdest question you've been asked?**

Probably, ''What's a body part that you wouldn't mind losing?''

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