

The Storying Project, a Sparkle Stories Workshop

Meghan Fitzgerald – Learn through play.



David:

Just walk me through what the starfish is feeling in this very moment. Then with human eyes, look around and tell me what you see.

David:

Hello this is David and welcome to The Storying Project, a Sparkle Stories Workshop. We are so glad you've come to visit this podcast where we delve into the process of creating an original Sparkle Story. What you are going to hear is a conversation between me, our chief storyteller here at Sparkle, and a special guest. Our guests are people from all walks, some you may know and others you might not, but all are conscious of the stories we tell our children and their impact.

I ask all of our guests "What do you think children need to hear right now?" And we have a conversation that will ultimately lead to a produced audio story for children. We will share a bit of that story here after our conversation.

Today, I will collaborate with Meghan Fitzgerald. We are so excited to have Meghan, the Founder and Chief Learning Officer at Tinkergarten, join us today. Prior to Tinkergarten, Meghan worked as an Elementary School Principal, a Math and Science Specialist and a teacher in public and private schools in New York, Massachusetts and California.

And now - with Tinkergarten Meghan is helping families all across the United States raise curious, creative and healthy kids with play-based outdoor early learning programs.

Thank you Meghan, and all of you listening, for joining us - and we hope you enjoy the conversation and the process. And be sure to listen for a special message from Lisabeth of Sparkle Stories at the very end. Now here is our conversation.

David:

Hi, Meghan.

Meghan:

Hi.

David:

I'm really glad to be talking with you.

Meghan:

I'm really excited to be part of this new project you have.

David:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's pretty fun. The kinds of conversations and where they lead, it's super fun. I feel confident you'll enjoy this. The name Tinkergarten feels like a full story in and of itself. It's almost a sentence already. It's got a verb, it's got an object. Can you talk about that story?

Meghan:

Sure.

David:

Where'd the name come from and how is it living in you now?

Meghan:

I would love to talk about that. The name and Tinkergarten was begun by my partner in life, Brian Fitzgerald, and myself and we conceived of Tinkergarten before we had any children. But we were facing parenthood and preparing for it and we both come from different angles toward education. I was a teacher and an early math and science specialist and then an elementary school principal. Brian was a very outdoorsy person who applied all of his skills to designing technology products. Had worked for Yahoo and Amazon and then ended up at a startup in New York City that was focusing on how adaptive learning had changed people's experience of learning anything using technology. But we were both realizing that there were some fundamental learning experiences that everybody needs in order to build skills like creativity or problem solving or a general sense of resilience and persistence in the world.

When we deduced it, we came back to these really formative experiences we'd had as kids at play in the outdoors. Everything we traced back were these really formative experiences outside, not terribly structured, very much based on imagination and play and problem solving that just naturally evolved from being with others in outdoor spaces. Having the ability to explore and invent and imagine and solve problems.

We wanted to create a company, really, that was all about helping families create space for that kind of learning again. Because we observed that this was increasingly absent from kids' experience as academic pressure was pushed earlier in my world, structure was being applied at every turn to childhood and time for play and time to be outdoors was increasingly diminishing. How could we create an experience that leveraged a way of being, community and structured learning experiences to help people learn to be unstructured in outdoors? This was our concept and we wanted a name that had both that playful way of learning in it, but also had real learning. Because we also wanted to really, more than anything, help people understand that play is learning. We've gotten away from that, certainly in the school systems I was working on for the younger grades. It was just people were doing play with their doors closed because they knew in their hearts that's what kids needed, but they weren't supposed to be doing it. We wanted to break that paradigm and help parents, especially know that play is really how kids learn.

We wanted something that was playful. Tinker just is a great word that you feel that when you hear it. Then garten was a wonderful double play on garden and outside and kindergarten, which is about learning and outdoors from Sobel from the beginning. Putting that together made it connote the outdoors, education and play all at once.

David:

Thanks for unpacking that and I was having this bodily experience as you were talking. I'm still with tinker. Because I didn't know about your background as a principal and about Brian's background. Tinker is also a tin smith.

Meghan:

In the 2000s it had really taken on this new feeling of MIT and the Media Lab were working on a tinkering approach to learning. There's a lot of education that was coalescing around tinkering as a concept. It was a good moment for tinker to mean that playful exploration and invention. You tinker with something, it's a very playful approach, but with some rigor behind it because you are discovering along the way. That's what we wanted to go for.

David:

Yeah, I can feel it. We business owners play with our titles. What's our job? There's the conventional ones and then there's the tinkered ones that feel a little closer but are also playful. You used two; founder, which is also a smith term. You've got tinker, you've got founder and the forge. Then chief

learning officer, which I haven't seen, but should be a term because that's for real. Do you feel like those at this point, in this moment, in this conversation feel like the closest things to titles of what you do?

Meghan:

I do think so. I particularly like the learning officer because I'm just always in a learner stance. My understanding of that is much more grounded in the learner than the teacher because I do feel like teaching is learning and founding is learning and every moment is learning. The more you can take a stance of learner, no matter what, and we happen to be in the learning business, but it really doesn't matter. We are constantly evolving, constantly trying to listen and learn from our community too, which has been probably the best part of the work. Is that Tinkergarten wasn't ever going to write things and then disseminate them. We create spaces and frameworks and ideas and research and compile that into a curriculum. But that curriculum is nothing until it's brought to life. Whether that's by a parent, whether that's by one of our leaders and our teachers who are education experts in their right and they're embedded in their own communities. That community comes together and experiences it and each instance of this is its own active creation and its own learning opportunity.

For me, I see myself as more of a facilitator and someone who's always listening and then making the next version better reflect what people have done with these ideas and the science that we put forth. Very much think chief learning officer is spot on. The chief part, I feel like I learn a lot from others and it's just like, "I'm probably the one that the buck stops here," so chief makes sense. But really, truly it's learner among learners is how I experience my work.

David:

I am hearing these clues about you in your work now and I'm wondering about you as a young person. Especially this relationship to learning. Can you inhabit yourself as a young person and talk about who you were and your relationship to learning?

Meghan:

Absolutely. Well, I always wanted to be a teacher. I come from a line of educators. A big family, my mother has three sisters. One was a librarian at heart, the others educators. My mom's an educator, my cousins. Teaching feels like breathing and it feels like the best expression of learning. What I wanted for Christmas more than anything, was a chalkboard and I would subject my stuffies to endless lessons. But even I moved on to get a whiteboard and I would practice for tests by pretending to teach even through high school math. I do believe as a teacher in a classroom also, when you can have children teach something to someone else, it is the highest form of learning. You cannot teach something until you really understand it and then can re-create it for someone else or re-represent it in your own way to someone else.

That's just how my brain works and I love to break things down and figure out how I would help. I say to my kids all the time, "Let's pretend I'm an alien and I just dropped down and I don't understand long division. Tell me, what is this thing? How does it work?" I always present them with opportunities to do that teaching back. Whatever I'm trying to help them understand or they're looking for help with, they start from a place of let me teach you what I know and then let's go from there. For me, learning and teaching are intertwined and very much one and the same.

Yeah, I knew I wanted to be, even though I didn't teach right out of school, I knew I wanted to be a teacher and it's just where I feel at home.

David:

Yeah, it's a very unique way of being in the world. I'm also hearing process, systems, really being able to break something down into something graspable. That sounds like that's always been with you.

Meghan:

It has. I think story is like that and narrative, so I've always loved story. I think a lot of teaching is good theater and good storytelling. That's how I like to be in a classroom. Establishing the setting, setting up

the problem. You have to engage yourself and what am I curious about? What's the hook? Why am I here? Even the learning and teaching that I've grown into, which is very much child led and probably most closely aligned with the Reggio Emilia Approach for early learning. It's always setting up an invitation or provocation. But that's very similar to setting up a story, so there is some kind of environment that I'm creating for you and welcoming you into it. I am intriguing you with something and then allowing you to develop the narrative from there. I'm here to support you in that process. But it's very similar to storytelling and not that dissimilar from how I would have wanted to teach.

I was a middle school math teacher first, so trying to get 12 and 13 year olds interested in algebra was why am I here? What am I trying to solve and how can I apply this? Trying to break it down into beautiful things that are underneath math are just phenomenal. But unfortunately that's not how my classroom experience was with math. But being able to bring story and bring meaning and making sense into that is really what I think you need to do with everything that you teach. In teaching math, in teaching science, in teaching some of these things and then growing into teaching even the most early experiences and skills. It continues to come back to those same components of the environment, the provocation or the invitation and then the support for that learning process towards some question or inquiry that we're exploring.

David:

That mystery. I can really see that in your face as you're speaking. That delightful, adventurous, magical relationship to the mystery of the teaching moment. You've mentioned stories a few times now and I wonder, can you recall particular narratives? Whether they're stories or poems or songs or something that you've watched when you were young that really made an impression on you.

Meghan:

Oh, there's so many. This is such a lovely opportunity to connect back with my family because I grew up among my aunts and my mother. We sang constantly. We are a singing people and they were all stories. They were all little story songs. Anything from A, You're Adorable to this silly song about different people doing different things. Also, my grandmother who was on the other side of the family, just being a character. Part of the story that I was trying to remember, her individual stories, there were just so many of them. But there was this mindset that she had that was a little bit magical and mysterious. There's a little bit of superstition and delight that ran through everything that we did. She had a wonderful way of saying things like, "Well, I don't know that I believe in the fairies, but don't let them hear me say that."

David:

Oh, fantastic.

Meghan:

And I love that and I hold that with me because I think you can make that social contract with children around stories where it's like, "I'm an adult and I can be in an adult space," but there's this opportunity to imagine other realities and step into them together. That they're always around and always possible and always part of our human experience. For me, that was how my whole world was. Fairies and stories and from all over the world. Certainly plenty of Irish stories from my grandmother, which generally were watch out tales for the most part, but always good. Always good to have.

There's one about Bridget and the leather bag, which I always really liked. The two sisters and the grandmother gives them the bag full of coins. An old woman comes and the old woman takes the bag in the middle of the night and steals it. The older sister goes off to try and retrieve it and finds it and just takes it. She goes along and different animals along the way ask for her help and she couldn't be bothered. When the old woman comes after her, they say, "She's right there," and the old woman finds her. The second sister, who is a giving and loving person, stops even though she wants to get this bag, she wants to get it back for her family. But she stops and tends to the sheep, and she tends to the horse, and she tends to the cow because she wants to help them. In the end, they help her, they make sure that the old woman doesn't find her.

It's this basic idea of giving to others and making time and space for other people, ultimately, even though not right away, comes back to us. Those kinds of lessons and stories, I think, were a lot of who you want to be in the world was how my family talked about it. Would go back to those characters.

The Gift of the Magi is another one that sticks out that we read every Christmas. For me, there's something just so poignant about that and I happen to have a mom and dad who would do this with each other and happen to just be each others' dearest friends. They always were trying to figure out what to get the other for the holiday and this idea that the true joy is giving. Even giving up your most prized thing to please the other and the irony of that story. Somehow how that always stuck in my mind as extremely poignant. That flip and surprise moment.

David:

We'll touch on the Gift of the Magi in a moment, but I want to go back to the Bridget story. It's amazing to me how over and over again, the role of the older child and the younger child shows up in all these fairy tales. And the older one, the clever one, the smart one, the motivated one is self-focused and just out for themselves. The world does not support that. It's often the lazy second child, the kind one, the dreamy one, the vulnerable one, the one that's easily fooled goes out and is just kind. That's their way of being in the world. It's interesting, I'm experiencing so much of what you're saying with your own story in this story and in your childhood of this dance between a clever utility process of unpacking the universe. While not in competition, but while dreaming in it. It's that gesture from your grandmother of, I don't know, but I do know.

Meghan:

She allowed for that double space, to have both those worlds because she definitely had a foot in each. Very thoughtful, would have loved to go to college and would tell you that every day, but the Depression and she couldn't go. Read every book, but then at the same time, had this space that she held for mystery and joy and magic and all that in between. And they weren't in competition, you're right. I think that in terms of mindfulness and there are many spaces in spirituality also. Having the flexibility to understand that there are things underneath all of this and not absolutes. Not having to get stuck in absolutes but being able to experience a range of concepts that I think stem from having that ability or being shown that that's possible early on.

David:

Yeah, yeah. I'm really feeling this back and forth in a really graceful way. Also, with the Gift of the Magi, between love and stuff. The stuff is ultimately an expression of the love and when the stuff gets subverted and the use of it in the expression of love. We have a story at Sparkle Stories which is based on the Gift of the Magi. Same sort of deal. I think it's called The Lemon Tree, of investing in the other one but also subverting your own plans for them. But ultimately it comes down to that love and what's in between that but some level of mystery?

Meghan, I'm wondering. I know you've thought about this and probably have thought about this your whole life with your work and your parenting. What do you think right now in this moment do you think children really need to hear?

Meghan:

Well, I am thinking that same message of kindness, but also that understanding of how giving and receiving are both part of connection. Because I do think that the world has become more self-focused, more that older child. Many of the tools we use and the spaces we connect and have allowed for connection, but once we dig in and once we've lived with them for a while, they actually tend to isolate and divide us a bit more and have us focus on self. Our expression of ourself and how we're received and how many likes. I think about that and I think about the generation that's coming of age right now who really grew up with that almost before, I think, everybody understood what impact that would have. I look at younger children and I think, "Wow, we can really help kids to feel more a part of a collective, more anchored on the giving and start to experience the joy that comes from kindness and giving to others early on, and get hooked on that."

Really lean into empathy and lean into not just random acts of kindness, but a kindness practice and a gratitude practice and a feeling of both that giving and that receiving, to get both sides of that. I do think you get wired to want that and to know that that's a part of your life early because I do think that is connected to a lot of the struggles that we have. We've seen narcissism double, we've seen self-reported empathy measures cut in half. Those are quite something, in the last three decades. That's wild and worrisome especially where to me, it's our super power is to connect with one another. And is to ultimately be able to support one another as a species even. It's not our claws, it's really our ability to work together. When that starts to be at risk at the macro level, to me, it comes back to those skills. How do we help children start to really understand that we are wired to feel for one another and to support one another? How do we help kids really ground themselves in that as their sense of self?

David:

I'm also hearing from you that we're not leaving the space of process, of practicality, of actual logistics. That is a part of your work at Tinkergarten, is it not?

Meghan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

David:

Could you talk a little bit about that? About how nature can be this regulating force?

Meghan:

Absolutely. Well, I think for one, getting back to just how we break down. I think as a parent or a teacher of little kids, what I just described in helping kids understand how they're connected and how to be a good person, it can feel a little overwhelming for how do you do that. Connection to the natural world, it just automatically helps in a number of different ways. Nature in itself, we are wired to connect to nature and to feel at peace and feel comfort and feel joy. Even though kids haven't had a lot of time when they're first in natural environments, it may feel stimulating in a way that's unfamiliar and humans like what's familiar. Time spent in nature really, the colors, the smells, the sounds, the creatures, it's just quite a natural process to feel a kinship there. That kinship inherently, it can help develop empathy. I think of stories a lot and think of animals in stories.

Animal allies is a concept that David Sobel had wrote about and I love that article that he wrote. That animal allies are a bridge to empathy because when we imagine being a bird or imagine being a squirrel or imagine being a cheetah, whatever it is, and we take on that personality, we're pretending and we're developing that cognitive ability to imagine being another creature. But we're also forming a connection to that animal and to all animals that helps us think of the needs of others, period. I think the more that we can spend time and we can get to know, we can care, we can pretend to be animals with kids, the more they're starting one of the fundamental pieces of empathy is cognitive empathy. It is this ability to take on the perspective of someone else. Nature gives us that opportunity all the time.

Creatures are fascinating and they're different from us, but there are so many connection points. We all need shelter, we all need to eat, we all have our young, we all care for them. This is life and it's being part of a bigger, very interconnected world. Then the next step is to add in some compassionate empathy, to make a bird feeder out of an orange and some birdseed. Then watch something that you did get utilized by another creature. It's so powerful for kids. Then it's more chances to observe that creature, it's an understanding that you and this bird are connected. And that that connection can be such a beautiful thing and such a sustaining thing for you both. From there, there's so many opportunities to clean up a park. We're going to do a one bag of trash day. From this one family that was like, "Everybody should do one bag of trash, what would happen?"

There's so many different ways to get involved and make an impact and feel that impact. The actual work itself is so good for your senses and good for your body and natural for you. I think that's a landscape that lends itself to care and connection by design.

David:

Yeah. As you were talking, I was seeing all these animals and you were talking about people. But I was seeing animals doing it, the picking up of the trash. I want to try something with you if you're open to it.

Meghan:

Sure.

David:

You've probably already done some version of this. But when you are in your flow as founder and chief learning officer and all the other things that you do for Tinkergarten. When you're in that space and you can inhabit that in your body and feel the feeling of I'm doing what I'm here to do. When you're physically feeling that and you can feel your body wanting to move in a certain way and operate in a certain way, what animal is that?

Meghan:

Good question. I feel like it's very joyful. If I think of joy, I was going to say I'm a star, so I'm thinking of star pose is more what I'm thinking. But that's not an animal.

David:

No, no. Let's start with that.

Meghan:

I'm thinking of yoga, so star pose to me is just fully realized. All limbs are stretching outward and they're engaged and open. Very open and lots of point of connection with others, so star-

David:

What about a starfish?

Meghan:

Yeah.

David:

That's where you headed, okay.

Meghan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David:

Okay, great. Yeah, because, I mean, talk about just making yourself available. Just stretched out and open to the sun. Do you think that there might be a story there with a starfish that we could tease out?

Meghan:

Sure.

David:

Does that interest you?

Meghan:

It does, it does. No, I think that's a really good one.

David:

Let's just be with the starfish. Is this starfish in the water or out on the beach?

Meghan:

I feel like it's on the beach. It's very comfortable.

David:

Okay, all right. Just walk me through what the starfish is feeling in this very moment. With human eyes, look around and tell me what you see.

Meghan:

Yeah. I feel like the starfish is colorful and stretched out and ready for a curious person to pick it up. Or to get inspired to lay down and make a starfish. Is existing there, welcoming interaction.

David:

Okay. Let's back up then and investigate what led this starfish to this moment, that he, she, they, what pronoun is coming to mind?

Meghan:

They.

David:

They, okay, great. Before this moment, making themselves completely available and welcoming to some passerby, where did they get the idea that that was a thing? That there is such a thing as a beach, that there is a such a thing as others and that they may be interested? Did another starfish tell them this, was this another creature in the ocean, did they intuit this?

Meghan:

I think they have encountered many different creatures along the way and they had a dream of seeing what was up on the shore.

David:

There was a dream, okay.

Meghan:

There was a dream and a curiosity. Curiosity came from the starfish, which is part of the starfish. The starfish is insatiably curious.

David:

That's just part of being a starfish.

Meghan:

It's part of being a starfish. At the center of all the limbs is curiosity.

David:

Oh, beautiful.

Meghan:

And love and wanting to understand. It's a drive to make sense and to see what's around the next piece of coral. The starfish has actually been on quite a journey. A starfish moves slowly but steadily and has

encountered many different creatures that have encouraged the starfish, challenged the starfish, inspired the starfish. Made the starfish flip understanding on its head and all sorts of experiences. After navigating all the way up to the beach to see what was there, it really was more about that journey of encountering all those creatures that makes the starfish want to share or be found and be that for the next person. Or continue that flow of teaching and learning.

David:

There's this gesture that you'll do, which feels very wavelike. The waves, they go up and they go down and the tide comes in and it comes out. It's this breathing process. While you were describing everything that was happening to the starfish in the water, all these encounters and learning and this curiosity that is the binder between all the different lens of experiencing the world, there was this coming up to the shore, the beach with an expectation. Is that the right word? Or is it the same curiosity that the starfish was feeling in the water?

Meghan:

I think of it as anticipation maybe more than expectation. But I think it was a drive to see what is beyond, what is there. But there was so much to learn along the way to that point.

David:

Along with the Bridget story, we have all these interactions with the animals and the two different ways in which the older sibling and the younger sibling interacted with them. The younger sibling sounds more like our starfish, and curiosity being available to them and learning from them. But then the threshold experience is encountering the bag of gold, right?

Meghan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David:

That would be analogous to coming ashore.

Meghan:

I think so. I'm trying to figure out if the coming ashore is the end or the anticipated end and then we come right back to the ocean to continue. Share back what we learned. Because I think another thing that I've learned and I think is an important lesson in life, is we have to maintain curiosity constantly. There have been so many times and this happens very much in the work that a founder would do especially. Is you have an expectation and you have a goal, you have a desire, you have a vision. But if you ever held onto that vision you wouldn't get very far or it wouldn't be all that it could be. This vision is always a starting place, and there's always another starting place, and yet another starting place, and yet another starting place.

All I wanted to do is get to that shore, but then I realized all the gifts I gathered were all these encounters that I had and that the ocean's home. I want to bring back this story and keep building new ones at home versus I want to arrive. What is arriving? We never arrive. We're always on the journey.

David:

Well, that's the classic hero's journey, is we're out and we just come back again. But it's not a closed circle, it's a spiral. You keep doing it over and over again and I feel like with this convention of a beginning, middle and end of a story, that's where we're imposing a process. Because the enlightened moment could be anywhere along there and it's a living thing. Kindness is throughout this story, why should it end? Instead, let's just keep breathing and go to the shore and it's just yet another threshold and then back into the water. Like the waves.

Meghan:

Even a misread of the Bridget story would be oh, good. She was kind so she got the gold. Good job.

David:

Right, mission accomplished. Right.

Meghan:

Mission accomplished. It was more like, "No, she was kind, therefore, she is living a life where she is continuing to give and receive." That's the goal. Because we listened to that and read that as a family and it's funny to see the different kids' takes on it. They're like, "Oh, well it just pays to be kind." Let's talk about that one.

David:

Yeah, right. Right.

Meghan:

That's a thin read you could make, but I think there's more going on.

David:

Well, we're all children, aren't we?

Meghan:

Yeah.

David:

We're the older child and we're the younger child.

Meghan:

Exactly, in balance.

David:

Yeah. Beautiful. I would love to create a spiral story, whatever that is.

Meghan:

That sounds wonderful.

David:

And see if narratively we can explore something that is like the tide and like the waves. It just grows and learns and teaches and learns and teaches. In the water, on the land, in the water and the land. And throughout it is kindness and curiosity. That sounds like a nice life, let alone a really lovely story.

Meghan:

If you could stay with those as your North stars, curiosity and kindness, yep, that would be a good life.

David:

Right. Thank you for that invitation both narratively, which I can now start to piece together. But also just in my day.

Meghan:

Yeah.

David:

Yeah. Well, I have as always, enjoyed chatting with you and learning from you. Letting my universe grow just in interaction with you.

Meghan:

Likewise.

David:

It's always a pleasant experience.

Meghan:

This is a particularly poignant day where I put one of my small people back on a school bus. So was feeling a little bit of a space, but this has filled it in the nicest way. So thank you for that too.

David:

Absolutely. Is there anything that you would like listeners to this podcast to know that we haven't covered? Anything more about your work that you'd like them to know?

Meghan:

Sure. I would think if people aren't familiar with Tinkergarten, you can think of us as every family's guide to purposeful outdoor play. It's our goal to help families take the early learning years, which are such an important time for growing mind and body and spirit, and make really creative and celebratory, joyful use of outdoor spaces. Also some learning science in there to help kids in a very natural process of developing and connecting to the natural world. Also developing skills like we talked about, beginning skills that they'll use their entire life.

David:

Yeah, how to be a good starfish.

Meghan:

How to be a starfish, yeah.

David:

That's Tinkergarten with a T, everyone.

Meghan:

T, that's right.

David:

Garten. We'll have links in the show notes.

Meghan:

Great. Thank you, David.

David:

Thank you. What a wonderful way to start the day. Have a great day and I can't wait to explore the story with you.

Meghan:

Me too, I'm honored. I'm so honored to be part of this. Yeah, this is great. It's so much fun.

David:

Thanks, Meghan.

Meghan:

Thanks, David. Take care. Bye.

David:

Hey, David here. I really enjoyed creating this story because it was this invitation to play with basic story mechanics and then land a narrative that was spiral just like Meghan and I had talked about. It became a very sensual story actually, and the images all centered around the feelings of the starfish. Here is a snippet of Center of the Star. Enjoy.

Center of the Star. Star was here again, and again felt the bubbling in their center. The bubbling was warm and at once held excitement, curiosity and a kind of confidence. A sureness, a solid knowing that whatever and whoever they might encounter, all would be right and good and their world would get much, much bigger.

Star was at the edge of the water. They hadn't know there was an edge to the water until a friendly ghost crab told them. Star had been in the water looking up at the sparkling sun above, they'd been feeling the bubbling from their center when the ghost crab arrived. "Hello," the ghost crab said. "Oh, hello," said star with warmth and delight. "I suppose you are a starfish," said the ghost crab. "I suppose so," said star, who delighted when other creatures called them this.

Some other creatures were quite sure that Star was a starfish. The swimming creatures or crawling creatures or wriggling creatures or diving creatures looked at Star, saw those five strong rays or arms and then said, "Starfish." While others looked at Star and said, "Beautiful," or, "Open," or didn't call them anything at all. Star enjoyed the name starfish and always smiled when other creatures used the word.

"What are you doing?", asked the ghost crab. "I'm with you," said Star gratefully. This was indeed Star's favorite thing, to be with others. It was truly what Star did. Star would connect deeply and learn about other creatures and feel their world get bigger. They learned about the deep from a creature called a tentacled squid. Star connected with the squid and talked about where to find oysters to eat. And the squid in turn, told Star all about the deep and what was like to feel the waters thicken and grow heavy. Star learned about the dark from a creature called a lantern fish. Star helped the lantern fish find eggs to eat and the lantern fish in turn, told Star what it was like to create light in the dark with one's own body.

Star learned about the coral reef from some playful clown fish and then learned about things called boats from fish called mullet. Star learned about people from the mullet, as well. Mulletts were particularly interested in these creatures called people. Star learned even more about people from a pod of dolphins. Star marveled at the dolphins and gushed over their beauty and grace. Then the dolphins told Star about how beautiful and curious people are.

Lisabeth:

Hi, this is Lisabeth of Sparkle Stories. What you just heard was a snippet of the full collaborative story that David and Megan created together. To hear the entire story, as well as over 1,300 other original stories, visit us at sparklestories.com. The stories from the podcast are all free to listen to and can be found on the browse page at sparklestories.com. While you're there, consider subscribing. You can start with an extended free trial when you use the code `storying`, S-T-O-R-Y-I-N-G. In particular, you might enjoy the Sparkle sleepy time series. It contains over 50 gentle, sweet stories to help children slow down into rest time or sleep.

The Storying Project, a Sparkle Stories Workshop, was produced by Marjorie Shik. The audio editor is Nate Gwatney. Theme music composed by Angus Sewell McCann. If you'd like to know more about Meghan and all the wonderful projects she works on, be sure to head over to our website for many useful links related to this episode. We are so grateful to Meghan for joining us and sharing her wisdom

and wonder. I particularly loved being inspired in new ways about the power of nature as teacher. And I was already completely sold on that concept. We hope you enjoyed it too.

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