



Visibility Podcast



## A hen, a pen and a passion for words episode transcript

Fiona

Hi everyone and thanks for listening to Visibility, the monthly podcast produced by CID, the Council for Intellectual Disability.

Here, we will be telling our stories, and exploring some of the issues that impact people with intellectual disability. To find out more about our work visit <http://www.cid.org.au>.

Now, settle in and enjoy.

Music

[CID's podcast tune]

Adele

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Council for Intellectual Disability acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



## Visibility Podcast

Alex

Hello and welcome to Visibility. Today we are going to talk to Naomi Lake a children's book author. Naomi is an avid journal keeper and a poet. Naomi is also a public speaker educator and ambassador to several Down Syndrome associations. She is a dancer and performer with the Light Opera Company in her hometown of Albany, Western Australia. My name is Alex Elliott. I will be your host today. With me is my co-host Adele Tashkin.

Adele

Thanks, Alex. Hi Naomi and welcome to Visibility. Now I understand you have some exciting news. Can you tell us about that to start off with?

Naomi

Yep I can. My exciting news is I have just written a third book of the Harmony series. Harmony the Forgetful Hen and the T Rex. And it is hot off the press.

Adele

Hot off the press. So this is part of a series is it Harmony the Forgetful Hen?

Naomi

Yes, it is.

Adele

And this is the third one in the series. The third book. What are the names of the other books that you have in the series Naomi?

Naomi



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Well, I have got Harmony the Forgetful Hen and the Lost Eggs. Harmony the Forgetful Hen and the Fox. And then the T Rex.

Adele

Wow, that sounds great. What sort of made you write stories about a forgetful hen?

Naomi

Well I lived on a farm and I love watching the chickens scratching around the yard. One day my mum and I were sitting on the patio and the chicken kept darting in out of the bushes. And I said to mum I think she lost something. And mummy said what would a chicken lose? I said her eggs of course! So my sister Paula asked mum for one of my stories and Paula gave her Harmony and her friend of hers and her husband is an artist and he was visiting from England. She requested that he do some pictures for my story. So she sent them away to make into a book for me as a surprise Christmas present.

Alex

That is a lovely present. So then you had the only copy in the world of a beautifully illustrated book. What is your first reaction?

Naomi

Well my first reaction when the book came I was just shocked standing there with my mouth wide open. I was I do not know I was a bit teary. And then everyone wanted a copy. So from there I decided to release it to the world.

Alex



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And so you started to work together with your illustrator Dave McCleery to get your work published. What was that like? Is it hard work?

Naomi

I think yes it is a bit of hard work there. But between me and Dave we both made a really good team. Started bringing the story together. Dave and I meet on Facetime to get the illustrations just right. He also sent three or four covers. I choose which one I want or just tell him I want something on a particular page

Naomi

And he does it. He is very clever. And he brought my story to life.

Adele

Naomi when did you first start writing?

Naomi

I've always loved writing since school. I find myself hidden away in the library and books are my friends and then books are calling me from there. Oh I want to be a friend with you Naomi. So from there I picked up a pen. Grabbed stacks of paper and started writing. And I knew my life would never be the same.

Adele

Hmm.

Naomi



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With the book and it transports me from the real world into the make believe. Filled with magic love and wonder. And I have become a part of their stories.

Adele

Wow. That is so cool. So was it always a dream of yours to become a writer?

Naomi

Ah yes I am going to be an author. I always say that. And then from there it happened.

Alex

So tell me did you get a lot of encouragement from your family?

Naomi

Yes I do. I really love them. Especially one of them is my mum who always believes in me from day one. And my three sisters always encouraged me whatever I do and I just love them.

Alex

So how do you like to write? Do you use a computer or iPad or do you write with pen on paper?

Naomi

Well, I started with writing with pen and paper. Once I like my writing I transfer to iPad afterwards. My ideas actually start with my brain and travels down through my heart through my shoulders into my arm and comes out through my hand and my pen. So it is like a wave of an ocean.



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Adele

That is so beautiful. So Naomi is writing something that you do every day as a practice?

Naomi

Ahh yes I do. I always pick up a pen and paper and wherever I go I can see stories everywhere. And it is amazing. I write in a journal every day...

Adele

So tell us Naomi after Harmony the Forgetful Hen was published you received a Tomorrow Makers Award and that allowed you to do something very special for other young people.

Naomi

I have toured small schools and remote communities in the outback Western Australia. Read to the students then we have Q and A sessions. Then activities are connected to the book. Everywhere I was the teachers and students did not want me to leave. With writing has opened up the world for me and that is why I am passionate about childrens literacy and showing them that anything is possible.

Hoping to do another tour further afield next year. And this time I want to travel to the Pilbara and the Kimberley depending on COVID.

Alex

So you are not shy about getting up in front of people. We hear you are a bit of a performer.



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Naomi

Yes.

Alex

What can you tell us about the Light Opera Company in Albany?

Naomi

Well I am an also a member of the Albany Light Opera Theatre Company. I performed in several shows. Well it is actually a series and so I did 3 shows with Abba because Abba is my favourite band. Well I just danced on stage to start off with. And one of the ladies saw me dancing. So she told the director and the director came in and said Naomi you are in the spotlight doing Abba. So the shows are produced by the theatre the Light Opera Theatre Company. They are for people of all abilities to display their talent.

Adele

I also believe you have a nickname that might be related to your favourite band.

Naomi

Ahh yes I do have a nickname. Since I did my performing everyone started calling me Dancing Queen from the movies and song and I just love that name. Anytime I look at my iPad there are photos of Abba saying Happy Birthday Naomi or Happy Birthday Abba sister. So I cannot run away from that.

Adele

No it is stuck now, hasnt it? So Naomi have you ever like combined your writing with performance then?



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Naomi

Ahh yes I did. I have written a short play called The View from the Magpies Nest to put to music and dance and performed on stage in the Albany Entertainment Centre.

Alex

And you have done a couple of film and television appearances too?

Naomi

I was an extra actually in Rams with Sam Neill and Michael Caton. But you can hardly see me though.

Adele

Was that a fun experience being on set on a movie set Naomi?

Naomi

Yes it is fun to do that. But also it is a lot of waiting. But I did not mind and I loved I just loved watching the others doing their parts as well.

Adele

Thanks Naomi. It is great talking with you today. We are now going to take a little break before hearing more about your life and career.

Fiona

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Alex

Welcome back everyone. Today we are talking to Naomi Lake. A childrens book author educator and advocate for people with intellectual disability. You are also a public speaker. Where have you spoken publicly?

Naomi

Speeches at various events and teacher workshops is also part of my public speaking. I have co presented at employees orientation days. I have been a voice for others who cannot speak up for themselves. And I have created and presented a PowerPoint at the Down Syndrome World Congress last November.

Alex

I understand that that was in Dubai. So how did you do that?

Naomi

Well, I did not go to Dubai, but it was over Zoom. It was an experience to have actually because I had questions and answers. And got quite a lot of good questions. Really hard. But I got a fair bit of good reviews as well. And I would also like to mention there is one in Brisbane in 2024 and I am planning to go there.

Adele

So the next one will be here in Australia is that what you are saying? The Down Syndrome Conference.

Naomi

Is in Brisbane and I am planning on going there with my mum.



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Alex

So you are a health ambassador for Down Syndrome Australia. What messages do you want to share with the rest of the community in your role as health ambassador?

Naomi

In my role as the health ambassador, I will create and present PowerPoints to doctors nurses hospital executives online health professionals and students. I tell them about the importance of inclusive communications to improve health outcomes for people with Down syndrome. I evaluate websites. Take part in surveys. Write and deliver speeches. And co-present webinars. I attend meetings. Sit on committees. Treat us as individuals.

Adele

On top of that you are also an employment ambassador for Down Syndrome Western Australia. Is that right?

Naomi

Yes. In this role I create and present PowerPoints to the potential employers to know the benefits of hiring someone with Down Syndrome. I also speak to people in workshops. I tell them about my experience in open employment. Award wages the same as everyone else who all wanted to be independent and contribute to our community. And also inclusion as well because they have got to be included.

Adele

Absolutely. Everybody needs to have equal opportunity to contribute to the world dont they?



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Naomi

Yes.

Adele

Having a job is everyones right isnt it.

Naomi

Yes that is right.

Alex

I understand you have written an e book. Naomis World.

Naomi

Oh yeah. I was commissioned by Carers WA to written a short story of my life called Naomi's World for the Disable The Label project. To tell people that there is more to life. It is possible.

Alex

Some of your favourite places are libraries. You have something special coming up in Albany Library.

Naomi

Yes, I do. Writing workshops. Working with a local author at the library in the next month. I am looking forward to that.

Alex



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So if a person with an intellectual disability wants to become a writer like you. What is the message that you would tell them?

Naomi

My tip really is I think everything. It is all about the process part of writing the book. I write every day. When I am not doing anything like when I am not working or anything like that I just find my me time. And I pick up my pen and paper and start writing every day. Sometimes I write poetry and sometimes stories and sometimes it's just the basics. So writing the story is the easy bit. And you have got to have the illustrator the graphic artist. You have got to have all those people behind you to help you out.

Adele

So Naomi do you see yourself as a role model?

Naomi

Yes, I do. I just love being a role model. For anyone to show them that anything is possible.

Alex

And you have a favourite quote from Winnie the Pooh.

Naomi

Winnie the Pooh is always my favourite childhood story. Piglet was the highlight. So Piglet says. The things that make me different are the things that make me me. And that actually covers it perfectly.



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Adele

So can you tell us where we can get copies of Harmony the Forgetful Hen books?

Naomi

Well I do have a Facebook page called Harmony the Forgetful Hen. And my book is also in a shop called Paperbark in Albany. And the Harmony website as well [harmonyhen.com](http://harmonyhen.com). Also you can get my short story on Kindle anywhere in the world. It is called Naomis World.

Adele

And lastly could there be another Harmony book that you are secretly working on Naomi?

Naomi

Yes, I have. It is a sequel actually.

Alex

Thanks Naomi for joining us today and sharing such wonderful stories and insights.

Naomi

Thank you for having me.

Alex

And to those listening, thank you as well. Please join us next month for another episode in the last episode of our extended Arts and Culture series. Stay tuned for further updates from the podcast team here at CID.



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