

INTRO: This is The Elegant Warrior podcast. It's the podcast about elegance in all of its forms. We're talking about our definitions of elegance and how we maintain it in times of trial. We're also talking about how we can advocate for ourselves with elegance and in a way that makes us most likely to win.

I'm your host, Heather Hansen, author, speaker, consultant, trainer and self advocacy expert. Let's talk elegance.

Heather HANSEN: Hello, my elegant warriors. Today's guest is a friend who has blown me away since the day that I met her. Zibby Owens is the creator and host of the award-winning podcast, Moms Don't Have Time to Read Books, one of Oprah.com's favorite book podcasts two years in a row. The CEO and founder of Moms Don't Have Time To, Zibby, has formed a media company that includes multiple podcasts, publications like Moms Don't Have Time To Write, and other communities designed to help moms. She's the CEO, Reader in Chief, and co-founder with Leah Newman of Zibby Books, a publishing home for fiction and memoir. She is the editor of award-winning anthology, Moms Don't Have Time To, a quarantine anthology, and the other anthology, Moms Don't Have Time To Have Kids. She's also the author of a children's book called Princess Charming, and she has a memoir coming out on July 1st, Bookends: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Literature.

Zibby is a regular contributor to Good Morning America online, and also writes for the Washington Post, Parents, Slate, and Medium where she is a top writer. Zibby regularly recommends books on TV and has been featured on CBS This Morning and Good Morning America. Named New York City's most powerful "book-fluencer" by New York Magazine's Vulture. Zibby currently lives in New York with her husband and her four children.

She always has a book nearby and in this conversation I asked her about that. We talk about how to read more often and get more reading in your day. We also talk about how she does all of these things that she does. And we talk about this beautiful book that she has coming out on July 1st. At the time of our interview, I had not yet received my advance copy of the book. I have since read it and it is a beautiful book. You don't want to miss this episode, especially if you love books even an iota as much as I do. Enjoy.

The one and only queen of all books, Zibby Owens. Zibby, it's so good to see you.

ZIBBY OWENS: So good to see you too, Heather. Thanks for having me.

HEATHER HANSEN: I can't get over, you know when we first met, it was a few years ago, and we were sitting next to each other and none of this had really started, I think you had started the podcast, but that was really you know, just started the podcast. And the amount of growth that you have seen in all of these different areas, not just podcasting, but now you've written not only a children's book, but you have your book coming out. What drives you to keep going? Is it passion? is it like, what is it that makes you want to do all of these different things?

ZIBBY OWENS: I know that was so funny, and you gave me such great advice that day at lunch, you know, I mean you really did. You're like, you should monetize this and you should do that and what is your strategy here? And I was like, I don't know which are the questions, I'm still asking myself every day. What drives me, I get really excited and I see what should be coming next and I'm just like why not? I'm doing it, let's try it go. So actually my team, I have some really amazing people I work with now, and part of the job is like talking me down from all of these ideas because for me there's nothing more fun than starting something new. Like launching something, the logo, like let's see how it does, how can we figure this out? Like I love that challenge, so it's really fun for me.

HEATHER HANSEN: You know, it's so funny because so many entrepreneurs and so many people who run their own businesses are multi-passionate. And I was just talking to a guy who has a stand in Bryant Park at Christmas time who does candles, and now he also does body lotions and jewelry and he's doing furniture. And it's a similar challenge where your team is sort of like what are you doing? But as long as they can sort of keep up and also tell you not this, not yet, it seems to be working and it certainly is working for you. When your love of books, it's the overarching theme, right? You know, from the podcast to obviously the book publishing, which I want to talk about that imprint because I think it's fabulous. Is that love of books, the constant in your life? You know, you've been through a lot through covid the last few years, which we can certainly talk about. Does the love of books sort of set as the foundation when things are going hard?

ZIBBY OWENS: Yes, 100%. I mean books for me are the through line with everything. That's why in my memoir *Bookends*, I structured it around books that had meant a lot to me. So I'm not into clothes, like I'm not into that type of stuff. I don't remember what I wore on a given day or for something important unless I happen to remember the photo. But I'll remember what I was reading. I'll remember where I felt for what book and where it came with me and sometimes I have to do it backwards. Sometimes I have to remind myself of certain books and I'm like, oh yeah, that's the book I read, blah, blah blah. But either it's through the book or through the experience, I can remember what I was reading because I'm always reading something.

HEATHER HANSEN: And I think your *Bookends*, *The Memoir of Love, Loss and Literature*, which is out July 1, 2022. I'm so excited to read it. One of the reasons, I mean, I'm excited to read it because I know you, but not that well, and I've met your husband and I've met your children and so I know enough to be like, oh, I know her and I've been to your house so. But also, the real reason I'm excited is I think the best authors are good readers. You know, people who read a lot and love to read tend to be good writers as well. And you read more than most to say the least. And so I'm really excited about reading it. But hasn't this book taken different iterations for you?

ZIBBY OWENS: Yes, don't judge me based on how many books I've read. I feel like then I should be a much better writer. No, I'm kidding. I first wrote a memoir after I graduated from business school when I had lost my best friend on 9/11 Stacy Sanders. And well, I mean, I started writing about it immediately afterwards and publishing in the school paper and I took a

year off after graduation just to write this book as a memoir. It only took a couple of months and I scrapped that, wrote it as a novel, scrapped that, rewrote it as a novel, and then tried to sell that book. But this was back in 2004. And the feedback I got at the time is much too soon for a novel about 9/11 to come out. They could have just been saying that to be nice. I'm sure it was probably terrible. But anyway, I wrote about that experience and then I waited a number of years. Life got in the way, I had twins. I did end up ghostwriting a book through that same agent at the time about fashion and fitness, But I really took a long time off to be with my kids at home. I had twins and then I had two more kids and so I was home. I freelanced every so often, but when I got divorced in 2017, I suddenly had all this extra time again, which I didn't know what to do with because I had been so used to nonstop kids. I mean, I was doing other things. I've always been really busy, I like being really busy but I keep being like, oh my gosh, I was stressed then. I mean if only she could see what I'm doing now.

So I got divorced and I had time to start writing again and writing articles and it's around that time, I feel like that you and I met. And I had just started the podcast, which was an idea of a friend, a new friend of mine who said, you know, I didn't have a platform and she didn't really like my book idea which was to write a collection of these, to compile the essays I've been publishing online under the name Moms Don't Have Time To Read Books. So I started the podcast. I think we talked about this last time, but the podcast has just grown since then. But I met an agent around that time when I was trying to sell this book, Moms Don't Have Time To Read Books. She's like, well do you have another book in you? And I was like, well what I really want to do is write a book called 40-Love, about falling in love again at 40 which I wrote. I wrote it knowing full well that I probably wasn't going to publish it because it was so private and personal. But I was like I'll just write it.

So I wrote it and then like the last time then I wrote a novel again with the same sort of themes but different people, like cast of characters was in L. A. and everything was different, but some of the same themes remained. I tried to sell that book, I literally sent it out to like six publishers in March, like March 10th 2020. In fact some of them told me that when they finally went back to the office a year and a half later, they had to dust off with it. So anyway, I scrapped that after I'd gotten some feedback, that wasn't quite right and the feedback went in two different directions. So anyway, I scrapped that project altogether.

Okay, well, I'll try doing this on proposal. I got a new agent, sorry, this is probably too much information.

HEATHER HANSEN: No, this is so important to go ahead.

ZIBBY OWENS: I got a new agent and he wanted to know what books I had in me and whatever else. I didn't want to try to sell 40-Love again, I put that away. But I did want to use all these experiences because not only had I lost my friend, but at this point in my life, I had gone through so much other stuff, so many other losses, traumas, ups, downs, sideways everything as life throws your way by the time you're almost 40. And I just had a much more complicated story to tell and I just couldn't find the right form. It was very frustrating. So Joe, my agent and I

sent out this one proposal and it was going to be called Happy Sad, Happy Sad, and it was a collection of essays. And we sent out another one, I can't even remember what I called it. And then finally, we arrived at this concept about having it be much more about books and I don't even remember how, but I just knew I was like, joe this is going to sell. This is 100% gonna sell because I would want to read this book and I can't wait to write this book. And eventually it sold. So there you go.

SPONSOR: Today's episode is brought to you by me. As good as I am at selling my case in the courtroom, as good as I am at making a case for my clients and my evidence in the courtroom, I sometimes forget to sell myself. And I want to make sure that you all know exactly how I serve people like you. So I do a couple of things, I go into companies and to associations and I give keynotes or trainings or master classes on how you can make the case for your team, for your ideas, for your leadership, for your products and for your services. And we talk about things like credibility and seeing things from another perspective and using evidence and overcoming objections.

And so I do that for all kinds of groups like Google and LVMH and the American Medical Association and SaveATree. But I also work with some people one on one. And with those clients, those people, I tell them all of the ways that they can use the tools I used in the courtroom to make the case for themselves. To make the case for more money, more resources, more time off the ability to work from home. So whether you work in a big organization and you're a leader who needs someone to come in and work with your team, or whether you're an individual who wants someone to help you to sell more houses or be a better teacher or get more raises. I am the person for you.

If you're interested, there's a link in the show notes for us to have a chat. I would love to talk with you about all the ways that I can help you to make the case for yourself and your dreams. Now, back to the show.

HEATHER HANSEN: I think that's so important for my listeners to hear. I hear from a lot of my listeners that they want to write a book, you know, and they ask my advice on, you know, how do you write a book? And you know, the answer is like you sit down and write, right? But the answer is also that you keep writing. I mean that is what you just said, Zoe, is such a story of resilience. You know, these, any one of those books could have been the end for you and for someone else. You know that oh, this didn't work, it's not meant to be. But you just keep going and you just keep going right away. You know, there are other people who would put a book away and then maybe five years later pick that book back up and maybe play with it. Was it that you knew you wanted to publish a book or did you know, do you think deep down, that this book was in you?

ZIBBY OWENS: Both. I've always wanted to publish a book, it's been my life goal since I was eight. I haven't known exactly what path, but I knew I wanted to be a writer and I just couldn't figure out how to get to that job. So I knew I wanted to write a book, but there is something about this story that I had to get out and I just feel this compulsion. I know I need to get it out

and I'm delighted it's finally coming out and now it's so soon, and I'm so excited. And I don't know, I've been sharing about myself forever in words, not in an exploitative way, but just sharing the common experiences we all have, and maybe saying it in a way that people relate to easily, and it's more accessible. And I just feel like there are people who need to read this, who need to hear what I have to say. And part of it is not just, what I thought at the time in 2004, was the happy ending was not necessarily the happy ending. So now I have perspective on so many things and it's intended to be inspirational, because I've had so many setbacks, as we all have, and as we all will continue to get, and this is how I got through them. And how books helped me all the way through too.

HEATHER HANSEN: Well, and I think that, you know, as a champion of books, it's no mistake that this book, your book, since it is laid out in the books that you were reading at these different times. I know for myself this is gonna be my booklist, right? I'm gonna read your book and then I'm gonna take because you know, you recommend books on Good Morning America and for Katie Couric on her online channel, and I follow your recommendations all the time. I often read the books that you tell me to read. And so this book is going to be a phenomenal list for me of all the books, any of the ones that I haven't read.

ZIBBY OWENS: I have a list at the back of the book.

HEATHER HANSEN: Oh, fabulous.

ZIBBY OWENS: And I also have like a little checklist that I printed, I was sending, I would have sent it to you if I had realized you hadn't gotten a book. And I have it on my website actually, bookendsmemoir.com, you can click and download a pdf of it.

HEATHER HANSEN: So good when I knew I was having you on, one thing, I need a little therapy, I need a little book therapy here. Because I have found myself, you know, I'm a voracious reader as well and I read a lot of books last year. I read a lot more personal development, I do read fiction as well, but I read a lot of books last year. but I think in large part that's because I was living in Durham and not as social as I am now. But I find the more time that I spend on the darn phone or with the darn phone in the room, the less I read and I know you've got a lot of balls in the air and you have to be on social media as, and want to to, connect with your people as I do, I want to be there. I know you read in the subway and all those things. How do you manage that? Do you set aside time for the social media or do you set aside time for the reading? I need help to get back into my deep groove of reading.

ZIBBY OWENS: I don't read on the subway. I don't usually take the subway because that's not, it doesn't work for my pick up my kids for where I live. But I have a timer on my instagram so if I've been on for an hour it alerts me. So I don't have an hour a day that I do it, but I pop on and off all the time just to post or just to check in or check in what everybody else is doing and I don't have that scheduled in. I also don't have readings scheduled in. But I still make time for both. Reading, I do a lot on the weekends. Sometimes, like if I have a weekend just with my husband and my kids are with my ex, all as I've gotten remarried, I'll say to him like I need from like 2-530

to read and catch up for the week. So that's what I'm gonna do, and he'll say okay and do whatever. So sometimes I guess I do set time aside in blocks like that, but more it's either in the mornings, in the late afternoon, sometimes I have this comfy chair behind me, I'll sit here in the craziness time where my kids are running around the house or they have a playdate. And they come popping in and out and checking in, but I'll just sit there and read and they know where to find me. And you know, I don't read like laying around on the couch. I'm reading like with a pen in my hand and actively reading, more like reading for school and I read at night when I'm falling asleep. I read as my kids are falling asleep. And so I just include it, and then if I'm ever on vacation it's like, oh my gosh, that's like all I want to do.

HEATHER HANSEN: That, I mean same with me, that's where a lot of the reading gets done. Now you mentioned you read with a pen in your hand. Do you feel like, you've read so many, I mean, do you keep count of how many you read a year?

ZIBBY OWENS: No, no.

HEATHER HANSEN: Well first of all, do you feel like you retain a lot of what you read? And second, do you ever reread any of the books? You know, I find myself doing that quite often, rereading a book that I've read some time ago. Or do you feel like, you know, it's sort of like vacation, do you always go to the place that is, has this warm space in your heart that you know so well and you want to return to? Or do you want to try all new things and never go to the same place twice? So it's two questions. Do you remember the things you read and do you ever reread your books?

ZIBBY OWENS: Yes. I remember the things I read, I do like going on vacation to the same places, but I don't like rereading books. I have too many books to read for the podcast. I don't have time really. And even if I did have time, I guess that's just not something I do. The only book I've ever reread, I think, is Dani Shapiro's *Slow Motion*, because it had always been my favorite book and whenever anyone asked me, I would say that. And then I realized, you know what, I haven't read this book in years, maybe I should reread it. Like why was this my favorite? I still love Dani I mean, she's amazing. She's still one of my favorite authors, but why that book? So I remember reading it sometime in the last three years or so, being like what? Like it's still really good, but I don't relate to that as much anymore. I mean it's about coming of age in your twenties, blah blah now, I relate more to what Danny's writing now, as I followed, as our lives, and she's even said like, gosh, I'm embarrassed by that, but I'm such a better writer now.

So it's interesting what affects you at certain times in your life and why and the things that you're struggling with, that maybe you don't even remember, you're struggling with, but when you read the book, you remember.

HEATHER HANSEN: Yea, no, I think that's absolutely right. And I think to, you know, one of the things that I love most about having a podcast is being able to have authors on. Because like you like when I was little, I've been a voracious reader ever since. And the thought of being able to talk to authors back then, like if I could have talked to Madeleine Langella Langella about A

Wrinkle in Time, I would have just died. And you get, you know, you are known as the person to go to when you've written a book, and your podcast is the place to go to, the first person you want to talk to when you've written a book that's gotta feel surreal.

ZIBBY OWENS: It does, but I also think, you know, not to minimize myself, you know, I have a daily show, It's seven days a week, 365 days a year. I still have such a hard time. I probably get 10 times as many books as, maybe more than that, that I can have on the show. But there aren't that many regular, you know, as someone who's trying to market books on the other side as well, there aren't that many shows with that much availability. And that you don't have to be a celebrity to go on because it's such a big deal show. Or it's a smaller show and that's fine. But maybe they don't only do books or whatever. So yes, I love that it's become that. I work really, really hard, You know, I can't finish every book, I try to, because it's like physically impossible to read seven books a week, like all year long. And some weeks I have like 14, because I have another week I have to take off of podcasting to do something else.

So I work really hard. I'm delighted. I try to stay on the pulse of everything coming out. And even if I can't have everything on my show that I want to make sure I'm making the right choices for GMA, so I have to know everything. So it's a lot of research and kind of a lot of pressure, but I love it. And for me, the podcast is my job like that is my full time job. I know I'm running a publishing company and all these other things, but that is like the center of everything else I do and it's finally, you know, profitable and all this stuff. So it's taken a while, but I'm very happy.

HEATHER HANSEN: Yeah, it's really inspirational to watch. There's so many things about it. I mean, the story that you just told about your resilience with your book and the book is Bookends, a Memoir of Love Loss and Literature, it comes out July 1st, the resilience of going back and going back and rewriting, it's going to make the book the best book it can possibly be. And also your love and passion for the book when you go out and promote it and talk to people about it. That's going to shine through as well. But more than that I think that, not more than that, equal to that, equally as inspirational, is your consistency. I mean, one of the things people say, like when I started my podcast, I think most people end their podcast after like five episodes. You know, people tend to give up on things and they don't tend to be that consistent. And the fact that you're consistent every day is something for people to aspire to. And then, let's talk a little bit about the production of the publishing company, because that too is something that's relatively new. I don't think you and I have spoken since you began that. What was the impetus for that?

ZIBBY OWENS: The impetus for that is I had interviewed over 1000 authors, and I had published two anthologies myself during the pandemic of essays written by authors who had been on my podcast. And I had gotten the same feedback over and over and over again from different authors about the issues they were facing, both on the podcast and socially. And when I was doing bookstore events and all these same themes came up and I always sort of thinking and analyzing bigger picture stuff and it just seemed to me that the big publishing firms were not set up perfectly for today. And that they were almost too big to quickly pivot where they needed

to go, not anything negative to say about the people working there. I've loved people I meet who work in publishing truly, and not for lack of effort, but sometimes I just think that structurally it's very difficult to adapt when you're so entrenched in the ways in which you've been operating for decades, centuries, whatever.

So, I saw an opportunity and I kept hoping that somebody else would do it and nobody else was really focusing on these points. And then I realized, you know, maybe I'm the one who's gonna have to do this. Like maybe nobody else, like I have this incredibly unique vantage point at the moment, where I have all this input from today's authors, and also I've seen it through my own book. So I'm like, maybe I'm the person to do this. So I'm doing it. It's a lot, I have wonderful people I work with, but there are growing pains like anything. It's a startup, we're manufacturing an actual physical product. It's you know, I'm grateful for having gone to business school for the shreds of information I actually remember. The best part honestly for me, in addition to just getting to know all these wonderful authors who are publishing and having them be so happy with the model that we have going for them, it's reading books and discovering something amazing like right there in Microsoft Word, like so early on and being like, oh my gosh, this is so good. So you know, that doesn't always happen, and we, I've read tons of submissions and really running out of time to do that. But it's a great feeling.

HEATHER HANSEN: Well and you're you, from the very start it has been important to you. I know from hearing you talk about this from the last time you were on the podcast to be a champion for authors. And so you know, Moms Don't Have Time to Read Books, the podcast that started it all, is really you championing authors. And then this, this publishing company, is also a huge opportunity for you to champion those authors who otherwise wouldn't get out there. And then I do want to mention, because I think it's a beautiful thing that you're doing, 22 in '22. Why don't you tell us just a little bit about that as well.

ZIBBY OWENS: Yes, we launched 22 in '22 to encourage readers to go to 22 bookstores in the year 2022. It really started because people were just getting back into the world again. It was late last year and I'm like, no one's ever going to discover these books by all these others, if they don't find them, they don't see them. I mean obviously there's online sales and everything, but there's just nothing like being in a bookstore and seeing what you're drawn to, picking it up, flipping through it, putting it back down. So I was really trying to get people into stores again. So we made all these fun incentives if you go to one store, five stores, 10 stores, and that's been great. Diana Tramontano and my team is running that and she's doing such a good job. We've partnered with almost 200 indie bookstores and that's been really interesting and it's just been great. It's interesting to hear life from the bookseller standpoint. So I'm really trying to get like life from all the different pieces of this business.

HEATHER HANSEN: I truly don't think there's anyone who knows the book business better than you do.

ZIBBY OWENS: No I'm not saying that I'm not trying to say that at all.

HEATHER HANSEN: No, no, no, you don't have to say it, but I'm saying it. And I'm not saying it, you might not be as deep as someone who's just in the public, but you are very broad, you know, you know about from the author's perspective, you know, from a publisher's perspective, you know, from a writer's perspective. I know that you have been really close to a lot of small booksellers, especially in the Hamptons for a very long time. It's just outstanding, and as someone who loves books almost as much as you do, it's aspirational and it's just lovely to watch. And I am quite sure, and you will not accept this well either, but I'm quite sure that all of that good book karma is going to come back to you right around July 1st, 2022, when this book comes out.

As we wrap up and you know, because you've been on before Zibby, I'm not gonna hit you with those same questions that I ask everyone because we have your answers and I'm gonna put a link to your last episode in the notes for this. But I do want to ask you just a little bit more about Bookends, what do you want people to most understand about the book? Like if they're thinking, well maybe I'll pick up this book by this woman who knows so much and has read so much, what will they walk away with after having read the book?

ZIBBY OWENS: I hope that they will walk away with a feeling that anything is possible and that life doesn't hit its expiration point until it actually does. It's never too late. It's not too late to try something new, find someone new, reinvent yourself. There may be obstacles, of course, I'm sure there are, I mean there are tons for everybody, right? But first you have to want to do it. You have to see the possibility that it can be done. So that is part of it that you know, if I can do this like all this, I can't believe it. So part of the book is like, can you believe this? You know.

HEATHER HANSEN: I have to say that when you say see the possibility that it can be done. I think that's absolutely true. I think that perspective is such an important part of life that we don't talk enough about. And if you can't see it, it's really hard to be it, you know, and if you can't see it, it's really hard to get it. And so for me, you have been something that I have seen above me, but in front of me, in some of the paths that I want to take. And so you're a wonderful example of that and I know the book will lend itself to even more of that. And so I'm really grateful, I'm really excited for you. I'm wishing you the best possible luck with this book run and I hope you enjoy the heck out of it because you deserve all of the, you know, you'll be hitting the marketing, the book pub tour and doing all of the different shows and everything. And I hope you just enjoy the heck out of it.

ZIBBY OWENS: Thank you.

HEATHER HANSEN: Thank you so much for coming on, Zibby.

ZIBBY OWENS: Thanks for having me.