



FINDING YOUR *own* WAY TO SERVE



Vanessa Wiegel, coordinating producer for WGBH, grew up a military child. Her father served in the Army for 30 years and retired as a Colonel.

“LEADERSHIP AND SERVING OTHERS WAS INSTILLED IN ME AT A VERY YOUNG AGE,” shared Vanessa.

“My parents met the late Major General George Patton and his wife through the West Point Society soon after I was born” Vanessa explained. The general would invite Vanessa’s family, along with other West Point alums, for a picnic at their farm every summer. “In the house, there was a room filled with military photos, medals, and other memorabilia from the Major General and his father,

using media to both foster discussion on important topics, as well as touch people on an emotional level.” It was an easy decision for Vanessa to join WGBH because she grew up on the shows they produced and Vanessa believed WGBH created, “... important quality educational television.”

During her eight years at WGBH, Vanessa has most enjoyed creating children’s programming that connects

our characters or stories. For instance, one young mother wrote to us about the excitement and gratitude felt by her son when we introduced Carl, an Arthur character who has autism.” Vanessa went on to explain that, while she and the team write about funny topics, they also tackle serious issues such as autism, cancer, and depicting the lives of military children through the character of Ladonna.

“It’s so important to portray characters with whom kids can identify.”

the famed WWII General George S. Patton, Jr. “It made a very strong impression on me as a child and certainly helped instill the values of leadership and service to one’s country and others.”

As Vanessa got older she found her own way to serve. She entered college as a pre-med student but, during the course of her studies, discovered a passion for filmmaking. “I realized that I loved telling others’ stories and

with young audiences. “It’s so important to portray characters with whom kids can identify.” Vanessa continued, “Arthur is all about authentic, kid-relatable stories. Our characters are just like real kids. They make mistakes, learn, and grow from them.” For Vanessa, one of the most rewarding aspects of the job is receiving messages from young viewers and their families. “It’s so wonderful when we hear from fans about how they identify with one of



pbskids.org/arthur

“I came in while the team was developing this loquacious, clever, and highly imaginative character. Not long



after her debut episode, I pitched the idea of featuring a military family on Arthur. Ladonna and her family were a perfect fit, and so we developed her character further and gave her this backstory,” shared Vanessa. Vanessa hopes that military connected and civilian children alike will identify with Ladonna. “We want to provide military connected kids with a role model, as well as spread awareness to civilian kids and educators about how to better support these children.”

Vanessa relates to Ladonna in many ways. “She’s an over committer and wants to tackle every activity under the sun. We are very similar in that way.” Vanessa continued, “And, like myself, she’s very close with her family. You can sense the cohesion and how they support one another.”

Vanessa is an example of a successful, resilient military child who found her own way to serve others. “There is such an immense camaraderie and sense of purpose among military families,” shared Vanessa. Her sense of purpose has allowed military and veteran-connected children to see themselves in the character she helped develop and spread awareness about the lives of these children.

FINDING UNIQUE WAYS TO SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

PAULA K. RAUCH, M.D. 

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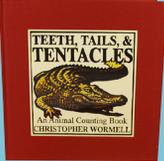
PAULA K. RAUCH, M.D., a member of the MCEC Science Advisory Board, has been addressing the needs of children for over 25 years. She has been enthusiastic about raising the consciousness of military children and collaborating with various organizations to do so.

Advisor to the show, Dr. Rauch encouraged the show's representation of military children's needs. "It's great to be able to include a military kid and family in *Shelter from the Storm*," an *Arthur* episode. Rauch goes on to explain that

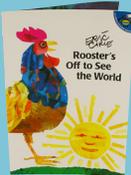
what is normal in a military child's life may not be in a civilian child's life. "Integrating Ladonna's story means that other kids who haven't had this experience are suddenly made aware, through Ladonna, what other kids in America are experiencing. **And for military kids, they see themselves represented instead of feeling like no one is seeing how they are making a sacrifice in sharing their moms and dads with America.**"

Rauch is the Family Team Program Director of the Red Sox Foundation/Massachusetts General Hospital Home Base Program. The Home Base Program is dedicated to healing the invisible wounds of war for Post-9/11 Service members, Veterans, and families through clinical care, fitness and wellness-based programs, community outreach, education, and research. "I focus on the impact of a parents' Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) on children," shared Rauch. "We are engaged in finding ways to support the resilience of military families, especially the children of those who serve." Staying Strong, an initiative of the Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital Home Base Program, is a parent guidance website for military connected families that Rauch supports and believes is a vital resource.

For resources, visit: www.homebase.org or www.stayingstrong.org




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