

Q & A with Kristi Yamaguchi

Written by Lauren Featherstone

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Olympic Champion, artist, author, wife and mother of two, Kristi Yamaguchi talks to Arizona Foothills about the release of her second children's book, "It's a Big World, Little Pig."



AFM: What inspired you to write a children's book instead of a book for adults?

KY: Pretty much my own kids. When I started on this whole thing a couple years ago, they were 4 and 6 so you know at that age when kids start reading and they liked being part of the whole process.

AFM: Of all the animals, why did you decide Poppy should be a pig?

KY: Well, when I decided not to have a little girl as a main character and go with an animal. The pig was my first choice because I've always loved pigs. I've collected pigs. I was born the year of the pig. Pigs have just always been around in my life.

AFM: "Dream Big, Little Pig" was No. 2 on The New York Times Bestseller List. Did you ever think your children's books would be as big as they are today?

KY: No, not at all. I mean I think that was obviously a pleasant surprise and something very fun, and it makes me anxious for the second one to come out because who knows what could happen.

AFM: Did your girls like "Dream Big, Little Pig"?

KY: Oh yeah, they definitely liked it and enjoyed the whole process and feeling like they were kinda part of it—well as much as they could be at that age. In the first book, my older daughter helped name the main character, Poppy. And Poppy's best friend's name is Emma and that's my youngest daughter's name.

AFM: You founded the Always Dream Foundation 16 years ago. What does mean your foundation mean to you?

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KY: It was all inspired by helping kids out there. Helping one kid at a time even and maybe giving them the inspiration or support or whatever it is they need to get them on track. We are focusing on early childhood education now which is nice because it ties into the books and everything. You know it's all about giving kids the tools they need as early on as possible.

AFM: You are an Olympic champion, and you were the first woman to win "Dancing with the Stars." Which would you say was harder?

KY: No comparison. The Olympics was a lifelong pursuit and years and years of dedication. "Dancing with the Stars" was fun, but no comparison to the Olympics.

AFM: Have you been to Arizona before?

KY: Many times.

AFM: What do you like to do when you come to Arizona? Do you have favorite spots to visit?

KY: Usually when I'm there it's for work or for skating so I don't see much or do much other than at the rink or working. I know it's a nice place, and they have nice rinks.

AFM: Where do you recommend Arizonans hit the ice?

KY: The Ice Den in Scottsdale. I have friends who coach there and whenever our show's in town we actually rehearse there. It's really nice.

AFM: Have you always wanted to be a skater or did you dream of something else when you were a kid?

KY: By the time I was about 6 skating was my thing. I just loved it. I did some ballet and I loved that. I wanted to be a nurse, you know all the usual kid things, but the skating thing I knew I would be doing for a long time.

AFM: As an athlete, artist, author, wife, mother and philanthropist, you seem to play many roles. What's your favorite role?

KY: Right now, obviously mother. I mean something that's probably my proudest moment is becoming a mom and I think every time you look at your own children you're in awe and I just want to hold onto that. Being a mom is my No. 1 right now.

AFM: How has being a mom changed your life?

KY: I'm trying to not travel as much. You know there are times when I'm on the road here and there. Obviously, for the book tour in March, it's going to be a little bit hectic, but other than that it's nice to be home. I like to be able to volunteer at school and get to know the teachers and kids.

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AFM: How often do you skate now?

KY: I don't really skate at all anymore. It's been over two years since my last performance on the ice.

AFM: What is an average day with you like?

KY: When I'm home it's get up, get the kids ready and get school. When I get home I try to get a workout in 2-3 times a week. Other than that I go with the girls' schedules whether it's dance or something else.

AFM: What else do you like to do in your free time?

KY: Probably just like the normal things. Spend time with your friends and family, shop. Going to the movies and dinner or something.

AFM: Do you have a certain place you like to shop?

KY: I do like Nordstrom. I have a very small foot size 5, so it can be hard to find shoes and they carry as small as a size 4. Their customer service is so good there too do if I need shoes that's where I go.

AFM: Did you ever think being a figure skater would lead to so much more?

KY: Not really I mean I thought if I could squeak out 10 years after the Olympics that would be great and I got 20. I've done so much over the past 20 years and it's been an amazing ride.

AFM: What's next for you?

KY: Immediately on my plate is the release of book two, and I actually have a second exercise DVD coming out at the end of the year. Something else exciting is that in fall 2012 I'm releasing an athletic clothing line.

AFM: What's next for Poppy?

KY: Oh I don't know; we will see. It's exciting to see the second adventure take off. So we will see. The second book has another fun message in it that should be a good message for kids and whoever else reads it.

On March 21, Yamaguchi will be at local Tempe bookstores signing copies of her book, "It's a Big World, Little Pig."