



Episode #92:

**A Conversation with 13-year-old Asher About
Deep Areas of Interests**

January 23, 2018

Debbie: What has your favorite part of that process been, Asher?

Asher: I honestly think it's the end result. It's always the end result. It's really nice being able to go, Okay, I now know all about this subject and I have a font I can use. I mean, I haven't done that particular thing, but I've done lots of stuff in Blender. It's really nice to be confident that I know about a subject and that I did something right and that now I can use it in upcoming projects.

Debbie: Welcome to the TiLT Parenting Podcast, a podcast featuring interviews and conversations aimed at inspiring, informing, and supporting parents raising differently wired kids. I'm your host, Debbie Reber, and today's episode is another Kid's POV special or what my 13-year-old son likes to call an Asher Special. If you're a longtime listener of the show, you may have noticed that I'm not releasing Asher episodes as frequently as I used to. Now that Asher is fully leaning into his teenage hood, things are changing a little bit here, so I'm giving him lots of space and just respecting where he's at. So while he's told me he's definitely still up for continuing to record specials, my hunch is they will be more spaced out than they used to be. And if you're a newer listener, I recorded eighteen short episodes with Asher since we first launched in 2016, so I encourage you to go back and check some of those out. Many of our listeners co-listen to those episodes with their kids and I've heard from many people that these episodes are really useful for both parents and kids, just to hear about things from Asher's POV. To access previous Asher episodes, just visit tilyparenting.com/podcast and click on the button for Asher Specials.

But today we *do* have a new episode with Asher, and the topic is *areas of interest*. As in, what is it like for Asher to have a deep area of interest? How would he like me as his parent to support his interests? Why does he get interested in things the way he does, and more. So if you have a child who likes to dive deep into things, whether it's Legos or dinosaurs or trains or bugs or *anything*, you might get some helpful insights from our conversation.

And before I get to our chat, I wanted to let you know that I have just put together a little "cheat sheet"—a one-page downloadable PDF you can print out and stick on your 'fridge that features my 10 biggest parenting strategies I took away from all the podcast episodes I recorded last year. The "cheat sheet" features advice from Dr. Ross Greene, author Jessica Lahey, executive functioning coach Seth Perler, and more. And it's designed to offer you quick, helpful strategies—a little parenting SOS if you will. I also created six beautifully designed wallpaper quotes from these strategies for your mobile phone so you can grab some inspiration on the go; just turn on your phone, and there it is. To download those and the cheat sheet, just go

to tiltparenting.com/cheatsheet. And now, here's my conversation with Asher. I hope you enjoy it.

Hey Ash, welcome to the podcast!

Asher: Hello Mom and various listeners!

Debbie: Hello! We haven't done an Asher special episode in a while and we thought today we would talk about the issue of deep areas of interest because I actually get a lot of questions from listeners about that, specifically wanting to know more about your areas of interest and more specifically how they can support their kids, because as you know, there are a lot of kids like you who get really, really, really, really interested in something and then that something becomes their world for awhile. And sometimes parents don't know how to be a part of that world. So that's what we're going to talk about today. So I'm good to you.

Asher: Yeah.

Debbie: So just for listeners to have some context, I thought it would be interesting to just share what some of your deep areas of interests have been over the years. Do you want to tell us what some of them have been?

Asher: Uh, well these are all various levels of depth.

Debbie: What do you mean?

Asher: Well, space and the deep sea had been my deepest interest; origami, Lego, Blender, and font, have all been sort of superfluous, not as important as the others. Blender or font has never taken away from space.

Debbie: OK, that makes sense.

Asher: Despite them going on at the same time.

Debbie: So deep sea was probably the first one.

Asher: Yeah.

Debbie: Do you remember when you got interested in that?

Asher: No.

- Debbie: it was kind of interesting. We were just back in the US for the holidays and we stopped by the Seattle aquarium where we spent a lot of time when you were younger. So one of the things I thought was interesting and you thought was interesting was at the aquarium you still remembered everything,
- Asher: Yeah, I did I remembered what everything looked like
- Debbie: Yeah. It was like all that knowledge of all those years was all still in there just hanging out, waiting to come out.
- Asher: Yeah, exactly.
- Debbie: So deep sea and space are kind of like *themes*. So you're saying they go way deeper . And the other thing are maybe your *interests*. But origami was a phase I would say though that lasted for about two years where you were pretty into folding any paper you could get your hands on and then Blender was probably a good six to ten months of you really getting involved in... Maybe it's not the same depth as deep sea or space...
- Asher: ...and now it's become more of a side project.
- Debbie: Right. But it is still something that once you have that interest and it sparks you. Then you want to learn a lot about it and you want to spend a lot of time in that space, right?
- Asher: Yeah, but Blender, origami, they were never as deep as space or the deep sea.
- Debbie: Yeah, okay, fair enough. I know that Ash, a lot of parents wonder, you know, I was researching in preparing for this interview because I do that with all my guests including you, and I just was looking at deep areas of interest with kids and one of the questions that came up a lot is parents want to know if they should curb their child's interest. Like... Asher, your eyes got really wide right now. You know, if a child is really into something to the point where that's all they want to talk about and think about and explore, some parents wonder like, is that a bad thing? Should I be exposing them to other things? Should I try to steer them in different directions? I'm curious to know your thoughts on that. What do you think? Do you think parents should steer their kids away if they're really into something?
- Asher: No, I think you should be allowed to pursue your interests. That's like trying to convince the world's best painter that what they really need to do with sculpture, right? Why turn people away from things that they're good at and enjoy. Why risk

all of that in the hope of getting a new, similar interests? Like you already have something good...just keep it.

Debbie: Yeah, I agree with you. I think that some parents get worried that um, or maybe they can't see the practical application of something and so they don't take it seriously as something that actually benefits the kid. But do you think that giving a child a chance to really lean in and totally explore their areas of interest, benefits kids?

Asher: Yeah, definitely.

Debbie: I'm wondering about how it works with a friendship. So my hunch is that your areas of interests tend to go deeper than most other kids your age. Like have, have you met other kids who share, who goes deep into their, the things they're interested in as you do, or have you always found that you kind of go a little bit deeper than most of your friends?

Asher: Uh, I think I go a bit deeper than most of my friends.

Debbie: Has that ever been a problem? Like, have you ever had a friend who wasn't as interested in something you're interested in and then that became a problem in the relationship?

Asher: No, because I'm interested in, lots of things. I mean I didn't used to be, but now I am. Really most of my interests came about because of my perfectionism. Most my minor interests, like for example, yeah. For example, I needed a font for something, but I couldn't find any fonts that I liked. So I decided to make my own and that's how I got in until I typography. I'm not even interested in typography. I just wanted to make a good font that I can use.

Debbie: Well, for someone who's not interested in typography, you certainly know a lot about it.

Asher: I'm not. Yeah, I'm not interested in typographic itself. I want something —a font — that I can only get if I know typography, or I can only make if know typography, and thus...

Debbie: And thus you're going to go in and learn what you need to learn.

Asher: Yeah, exactly. That's how I got interested in blender, too. I needed a 3D render of something and then I became all obsessive about photorealism and now I'm like simulating different wavelengths of light so I can have dispersion and things. Just in case I ever need to render anything with that in it.

Debbie: Right? Cause that happens every day.

Asher: Just in case!

Debbie: It's interesting that you use the word *obsession* and I am curious to know your thoughts on that because I think that is something parents worry about or they wonder about, like is this interest moving into an obsession and you know, obsession has a negative connotation and I actually obsessions can disrupt your life if they become something you focus on too much.

Asher: Did I say obsession? I don't remember that,

Debbie: You did...you just kind of mentioned it. And I don't think that you are obsessed but I was curious, but you mentioned the word obsession.

Asher: I'm obsessed with having everything just the way I want it. I don't want to have anything out of place or like... I don't want to every time I, every time I look at a document I've made go, oh, that font . I wish I'd use a different font or oh, that isn't a perfect circle or the line of cemetery on the E off by a few degrees and so I'm making my own font that has none of those problems.

Debbie: Unfortunately, you live in a world full of imperfect fonts.

Asher: And thus, I will surely end up good at everything. I will rebuild all of civilization from scratch the right way.

Debbie: Oh my word, no, that's not obsessive at all... [laughing]

Asher: That would be an obsession if I reinvented all of modern civilization just so I could.

Debbie: One of the questions a parent wrote, I mean you kind of answered this, but see if you can go a little deeper with it. 'I'm curious to whether your areas of interest change completely over time or if they stay within the same area, but evolve and become more sophisticated as you get older.'

Asher: I would say they change. They don't change completely over time. I still retain all of my knowledge and interest about the previous thing, but I don't, but I'm not active anymore, you know. I still find oceanography interesting and I go to aquariums and know lots of obscure facts, but I don't like. Well I don't go aquariums...

- Debbie: No, but if we're traveling and there's a nice aquarium there, you're still.
- Asher: Yeah.
- Debbie: But, but you're not all marine life all the time.
- Asher: No.
- Debbie: I'm curious about *space*. That's your broad deep area of interest right now. Um, that's kinda replaced oceanography and deep sea. And that hasn't waned in a couple of years. Do you see that one lasting?
- Asher: Yes. Because space is a whole lot harder to explore than the ocean. No film director is going to...
- Debbie: ...James Cameron ruined it for you, didn't he?
- Asher: Yes, he did.
- Debbie: Listeners, I'm referring to when James Cameron explored the Marianas Trench. That was a difficult blow for Asher.
- Asher: That was the easiest thing to explore. That was the easiest thing to explore on Earth...
- Debbie: ...that hadn't yet been explored.
- Asher: The last *big thing* to explore, but nobody's going to explore space in less than 20 years.
- Debbie: Right. So you can still be on the cutting edge of that.
- Asher: Yeah. That's the main reason for the shift.
- Debbie: Yeah, makes sense. I really liked this next question from a listener and it's something I'm really curious about actually. This person writes, 'Hi Asher, my 13 year old son is homeschooled. Will I take some of the fun out of interest by incorporating them into schoolwork?'
- Asher: I don't know. Personally, I don't that much like to have my interest incorporated into school work, because often the person doing the incorporating doesn't know as much about them as I do.

Debbie: Are you talking about me?

Asher: Yeah. And then I get all caught up on the details that you got wrong and focus even less on the schoolwork, but maybe that's just because I'm a perfectionist.

Debbie: Well, here's my question then that's related to that. The first year we were homeschooling you were still really into marine biology and so I signed you up for a virtual class on oceanography. Do you remember?

Asher: Yeah, that was fun.

Debbie: So. I wasn't teaching you. I didn't know that much about it, but I was like, oh, this is something he's really into. Let me find a class or, I saw you were getting into Photoshop and I was like, oh, let me see if I can find a class on Photoshop.

Asher: I still haven't done it, but I'm meaning to....

Debbie: But so that's, I mean like, and maybe this is what the listener was wondering too, if you're really into something and then I find opportunities to build those into school and say, Oh, if you really want to work on that, let's read a book about this then. Or here's a class about...

Asher: Yeah... when you said incorporating into schoolwork, I thought like making word problems in math. Like Timmy's school of fish has three fish in it. If it meets another school of eight fish, how many fish will the new school have?

Debbie: Alright, so that would be uninteresting to you...

Asher: Yes. I don't like that.

Debbie: But finding resources and books or videos and classes...

Asher: Yeah, incorporating the subject itself into schoolwork...

Debbie: ...that wouldn't make you lose interest in something?

Asher: No. It wouldn't make me lose interest in something to have to do it for school. For me at least.

Debbie: Yeah. And it wouldn't take the fun out of it?

Asher: No. Well, as long as it's done well.

Debbie: Yeah. And I'll just add that, you know, with your current interest, with regards to the font, that's something that oftentimes we're doing school and that's something you'd rather be doing. And I also recognize that you learn a ton through doing the font. Like there's, you're using math and you're using organization and you've...

Asher: Yeah, I've learned a lot of trigonometry.

Debbie: Yeah. And you've learned, you know, that leads into different scripts and languages and things.

Asher: And I've also learned the whole Greek and Cyrillic alphabets.

Debbie: Right. And I see benefit in all of that so...

Asher: ...because, because it wouldn't be fair to do just Latin and Greek, I had to do Cyrillic too.

Debbie: Right. We need to be fair with our fonts creation.

Asher: Because Latin is what English is in, and Greek is what's used in lots of scientific stuff. Right. So I needed both of those and I figured out how I might as well do Cyrillic too. It's only fair, it's only fair to almost double my workload.

Debbie: Well, it has been and you know, we were figuring, I think it's been four months or something since you started working on this. So it has been...

Asher: And then I remembered my art teacher uses Cyrillic, so it's all turned out to be worthwhile.

Debbie: Well, yes, and as I was saying, I recognize that you're getting a lot out of it, so maybe a month ago I suggested why don't we just make this a class some days and because I'm totally fine with that. So that's one thing that we've done in homeschooling is make font a class on some days. Has that worked well for you?

Asher: It has. Because likely as not I've had some inspiration and I can't wait to try it out.

Debbie: Yeah. Okay, cool. Here's another question for you. This listener says, 'My question is how can parents support an area of deep interest that they have no particular knowledge of or sometimes no personal interest in?'

Asher: Well, if you have no knowledge of it, that's simple enough. Just listen when the subject is talking about it and you'll learn some stuff.

Debbie: When the subject, the *child* you mean?

Asher: Yeah.

Debbie: OK, so listen to the child. But what if it's a younger child who wants to know more about something but you as the parent don't know anything about it and you're not really that into it anyway. Like, what would you as a kid want from your parent in that situation?

Asher: I would want them to buy me books on said subject, but not basic books. like medium to advanced books, because at least for me, I know all the basic stuff and I would be insulted.

Debbie: Well, when you were younger you needed to learn the basic stuff. So I guess it depends on your level and your age. Right?

Asher: Right. Yeah.

Debbie: Okay. So buy books. And then you said, listen. So that's something I wanted to share with listeners that that's a big part of what I see my job as. I don't even mean the word *job*, but I do consciously set aside time and often it's during our walks or runs to just listen to what you want to share about your projects. Do you think that's important?

Asher: Yeah.

Debbie: Have you found that friends aren't as interested to listen about things or is it important for you to be able to talk about these things?

Asher: Yeah, it's not as important to be listened to as is to talk about them.

Debbie: Oh really?

Asher: Yeah. Some of the time I find myself working out problems just with Mickerson here.

Debbie: Mickerson.

- Asher: Yeah, I'm like, 'Mickerson, the serifs on this letter are too small. What do I do?' And then I'm like, 'Oh yeah, I should do that. Thanks Mickerson!' And he's never said anything, but I just work it out in my head. Kind of like when I'm looking for something, and I'm like, 'Mom, where are my headphones?' and then before you answer, I find them, and then I go 'Thanks mom.' Even though you haven't helped me at all. For some reason asking you for help has helped me solve the problem on my own.
- Debbie: And just for listeners, Mickerson is... Do you want to explain who Mickerson is because we have a lot of new listeners?
- Asher: He's a purple-ish blue stuffed animal.
- Debbie: A Monster, right? Maybe I'll share a photo of him.
- Asher: No, you can't. It has to stay secret. He's a secret agent.
- Debbie: Dude. You have painted him. There's paintings all over the place.
- Asher: Exactly! But you can't know that's Mickerson.
- Debbie: OK.
- Asher: It's all top secret.
- Debbie: OK. So yeah, and actually strategy Asher that you were just saying where you just want to talk things through. That's um, we watched a short video by Dan Pink about that. What was it called? A rubber duck...
- Asher: ...problem solving. Where you take a rubber duck and you're like, 'Rubber Duck, help me. I can't figure out how to do this letter on the font that looks too weird.' And the rubber duck is like, 'have you tried making the serif's bigger?'
- Debbie: The rubber duck does not talk back... [laughing]
- Asher : [Laughing] Sorry... I wasn't paying attention. And you're like, 'Oh yeah, I could make the serif's bigger!'
- Debbie: Yeah. It's basically just verbalizing something you're stuck on can help you figure it out so you don't have to verbalize it to another person. Sometimes just an

inanimate object will work and some, sometimes Mickerson is a better listener than I am, too, right?

Asher: It's much less annoying to other people if you use an inanimate object, plus when you get the solution you came up with it entirely on your own.

Debbie: So I just wanted to, before we wrap up, just for listeners, just share that for me specifically some of the things that I have done to support Asher's area of interest. One is what we just discussed that I'm really always up for a conversation to talk about it. I really try to understand. I will admit that I do not always understand, especially when you're talking about things you're doing in Blender. I do the best I can and sometimes I need to show me exactly what's going on, but I also know that it is just important for you sometimes to be able to share things. And then what I'm good at helping you do is problem solve if you're stuck on more of a process kind of a thing.

Asher: Yeah, 'cause I'm like 'I need to map the IOR to the lambda to correctly simulate chromatic dispersion and you're like, what?

Debbie: My God, I'm falling asleep. Just hearing that. [laughing] Just kidding. So that's one thing I do. Um, another thing that I try to do is use your area or areas of interest as a launchpad for other things. So I always want to support you in your personal projects because if you're really excited about something and you are so focused when you're working on a project related to an area of interest, and so for me, I think, well this is a great time then to also build in some of those other skills like planning and goal setting and scheduling and all of those kind of executive functioning skills that are so important for every kid to learn. I see your areas of interest as a great way to work on those because you're already personally committed and invested.

Asher: Yep!

Debbie: Do you know that I'm doing that at that time?

Asher: Doing what?

Debbie: That I'm using your areas of interest to sneak and all this other skills building.

Asher: What other skills building?

Debbie: I just said... scheduling, planning, problem solving, goal setting.

- Asher: Yeah. Those are skills I need to know to complete the project.
- Debbie: Right.
- Asher: You're just helping.
- Debbie: It's a win win! Another thing that I do is I tend to send you articles so, Ash and communicate on Skype a lot, sometimes from different floors of our apartment or sometimes...
- Asher: ...in fact, we're communicating on Skype from different floors of our apartment right now!
- Debbie: We are indeed. Sometimes I'll be out working at a café and you'll be here and I'll stumble across an article about something Space X just did and I will Skype it to you and I'll just. Or I'll email you and say, 'Hey, I found this thought you might find it interesting.' So I try to curate things for you too. And then, as I said, sometimes making an area of interest a school subject. So those are kind of the key things that I do personally to support areas of interest. And, and I learn a lot have to say I've learned so much through Asher's areas of interest and I think that's kind of cool. So I just had a couple of fun questions. One is, when did you notice your interested in creating fonts for the first time and that was because you didn't find any fonts to be good enough?
- Asher: I would say at least three quarters of my interests are because I needed something and nothing existing was good enough. So I learned a whole skill just to do it right.
- Debbie: What is your favorite part of that process been, Asher?
- Asher: I honestly think it's the end result. It's always the end result. It's really nice being able to go, Okay, I now know all about this subject and I have a font I can use. I mean, I haven't done that particular thing, but I've done lots of stuff in Blender. It's really nice to be confident that I know about a subject and that I did something right and that now I can use it in upcoming projects.
- Debbie: Do you think that confidence bleeds over into other things that you want to learn about?
- Asher: Kind of, yeah. I'll definitely be more willing to learn something new if I know it'll end up with another thing I could use. Yeah. Most of my projects are practical projects to make more projects from. For example, with this font, I can now use this font to like write things in. So all my documents, etc, for other projects can be in my

font and I especially measured everything so that it's readable too. Actually worst case scenario, I redo all the lowercase because the X height is too low, but otherwise...

Debbie: Yyeah. You're getting there. This is my last question and someone just wanted to know what your favorite and least favorite fonts are? Just one of each.

Asher: Well my favorite font is either Didot or Bodoni. I think probably Bodoni.

Debbie: Yeah, that's what I was going to guess for you.

Asher: My least favorite font is either Comic Sans or Papyrus.

Debbie: Yes. It's always a joy to be out walking with you somewhere and then have you spot one of those two fonts on a sign.

Asher: Yeah, and now I've developed a pet peeve for when people spell "ij" in Dutch as a "y" because they're actually separate letters that can be drawn together as a ligature but only in lower case and so it's very annoying.

Debbie: Got It. Before we go down the rabbit hole...

Asher: ...the rabbit hole of things that annoy me..

Debbie: Yeah. Let's wrap this baby up.

Asher: I don't even think I could write a list. I wouldn't be able to remember all of them. If I wanted to make a list I'd have to like walk through the whole city and just as soon as I saw things that annoy me, write them down.

Debbie: No, that sounds like a great field trip idea for another day. [laughing]

Asher: Yeah. 'Ah that font. That uses a "y" instead of an "ij" and I like write that down. That line on the "k" is diagonal and I write down "diagonal..."

Debbie: Okay. Before we say goodbye, do you have any last thoughts? Maybe advice for kids who have a really deep area of interest that maybe other people don't really get or appreciate? Any thoughts for the kids listening?

Asher: There are so many areas of interest, there is sure to be a community.

Debbie: That is fantastic.

Asher: And if there is a community, they probably have a forum with useful advice.

Debbie: Excellent.

Asher: That's how I solved a lot of problems in my font. Actually, there's a typographers forum and I'm like, 'Does X height really matter that much to its readability?' 'No, not really. Although traditionally you use a smaller X height for titles' and all this useful information.

Debbie: That's a great answer. I so appreciate that tip and I think it's a great one and a great reminder that there are people who share your interests out there and they're probably hanging out together in communities online and um, that's great to know that you're never really alone even if the people in your immediate family or your friends don't necessarily get what you're up to.

Asher: Yeah.

Debbie: Awesome. All right Asher. Well thank you so much for this conversation today. I get a lot of feedback on the Asher specials and I know a lot of parents listening with their children and I just really always appreciate you being willing to share what's going on inside your head and your thoughts and feelings about all this stuff. So thank you so much.

Asher: You are very much welcome.

Debbie: You've been listening to the TiLT Parenting Podcast. For the show notes for this episode, visit [tiltparenting.com/session 92](http://tiltparenting.com/session92). And don't forget to check out my After the Show short video where I share my top takeaways from my conversation with Steve. You'll find a link on the show notes page, or you can go straight to [tiltparenting.com/after the show](http://tiltparenting.com/after-the-show). If you enjoy the TiLT Podcast and would like to help me cover the costs of producing it, please consider signing up for my Patreon campaign. Patreon is a simple membership platform that allows people to make a small monthly contribution—as little as \$2 a month—to fund the show. If you want to help visit Patreon.com/tiltparenting. Lastly, if you like what you heard on today's episode, I would be grateful if you would take a minute and head over to iTunes and leave us a rating or review. That really helps our podcast get noticed in the crowded parenting podcast space. Thanks again for listening. For more information on TiLT Parenting visit www.tiltparenting.com.

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