



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series, Meeting 369

[00:00:02] Peggy

Well, welcome everyone to reading number 369 of our It's About Time Writers' Reading Series. This is officially a partner program with the Seattle Public Library. They have given us a home for the bulk of its existence different locations and have beautifully stepped up to provide us a way to connect during the Library closure times. I know for sure that we will be remote again in September, can't speak for October. Tonight, we're going to have some open mic. We have what I call special guest Glenda West, followed by Lyn Coffin and then Euphrates Moss Phrate. I hope will be joining us that is his writing name and then we'll be closing with Loreen Lilyn Lee. The other thing you should know are that we have books. We were a bit shut down by the -we're supposed to have readings that were cancelled at Third Place Books. So if anybody does not already have a delightful copy of the anthology of It's About Time Writers' craft essays called So Dear Writer for a mere 12 dollars with original art on it showcase.

[00:01:31] It includes the, forgotten now how many, is like 13? I don't know 13 or 17 - great pieces for the new or experienced writer at all stages and it's been reported back to me that it is extremely useful. I am prejudiced because I help put it together.

[00:01:58] Many of you know that I facilitate writing and have for at least 10 years at Cancer Lifeline. And, it's been my privilege there to meet so many talented writers who often did not identify as writers when they first came in. Some did some didn't, and as part of that it was my privilege, oh, I'm not sure about a year and a half ago. I honestly don't how long ago it was that I met Glenda. But Glenda appeared and she was already known to others at Cancer Lifeline through different groups and different writing programs. But I now have the privilege to - somewhat probably to her wife's chagrin - call her my twin. We share a half, her half-birthday, no her birthday is my half birthday. And, so as a special request for my 60th birthday tomorrow, I asked Glenda to forego her usual Thursday night, at least the beginning part of her Thursday night, to be our special guest and read some of the incredible work that she's been writing - especially during this time of incredible upheaval. I've been joking recently that while everyone

[00:03:24] else is, you know, cleaning out their basements, the muse has taken up residence in her house. I asked if she could share, she said maybe I should have asked for that for my birthday instead of asking her to read tonight, but I am delighted to welcome my friend and sort of twin Glenda West. She's a Seattle native. She started her career in writing working with the resident poet from the

Seattle School District. She studied at the University of Washington, under the poet Colleen McElroy, and graduated with a degree in creative writing and a discipline in poetry. She has worked with the city of Seattle's Civic Poet and the Washington state poet laureate. She currently has a poem published on the Seattle Poetic Grid. Recently she had five poems featured in a joint project between Cancer Lifeline and the Northwest Collage Society. Her last "live" appearance was as featured reader at Word Chaser at the Racer. She owns a contracting business along with her wife. Welcome, Glenda.

[00:04:31]

Uh oh, [indicenrable] goes dark? Glenda! What's going on? We can't see you Glenda!

[00:04:38] Glenda

Am I unmuted?

[00:04:40] Peggy

You're unmuted but you're invisible.

[00:04:43] Glenda

You can see me?

[00:04:45] Peggy

Can anybody else see Glenda? No due to low bandwidth your video is not currently available. Oh, no, can you turn off anything else in your computer?

[00:05:02] Glenda

Let me get on a different...

[00:05:05] Peggy

Well, in the meantime we're gonna have three minute open mics from Bob Reeves, Jeff Cottrell, and Kevin J O'Connor. If anybody is interested, please let me know. This is being recorded for YouTube. I think we have figured out, no Mona figured this out, Mona Loh and Sheri Davenport are, have been our patient, perseverant assistants at the Seattle Public Library helping to make this a go. And they have also been working on a way to have it so that you have your identities are not shared on the YouTube recording. So, well Bob you're visible. So I think we may have to start with you as open mic.

[00:05:52] Bob

We can see Glenda now.

[00:05:54] Peggy

Oh, well, I can't.

[00:05:58] Bob

Oh. [chuckles]

[00:06:02] Peggy

[Laughter] Maybe it's like if you go - like at a rock show - Glenda, Glenda, Glenda! She was recently featured on a national town hall with Suze Orman - I guess some of you heard of, and I gotta say her video and audio was superb that night. So, she'll be along. Well, Bob.

[00:06:32] Bob

Do you want me to read?

[00:06:33] Peggy

I want you to read.

[00:06:34] Bob

All righty.

[00:06:35] Glenda

You can't see me?

[00:06:36] Peggy

Not yet. But but probably you'll pop up while Bob's reading so we'll let you know when we can see you.

[00:06:44] Bob

I can see right now. Two poems. The first is tiny called, "Printer." Facebook wants me to wish a dead woman happy birthday. Let her know you're thinking about her, help her to have a great day. I picture a printer attached to a gravestone spitting out all the birthday wishes sent every year since her death - covering the grave like leaves. And the other one is called, "My View." I look out the window onto a ground dressed with sun. Poor shreds of undistinguished trees. Here and there sharp glass flashing. Dirty raccoons shoving by more often than should be likely here downtown on their way to cloudy mysteries. It's night though, and something in me refuses to see the outside reduced to colorless bone of itself. In bully glare from the still lot behind the link fence. Something. I know what the something is - fever mirroring sun, collecting it in my cheekbones and nose, a red cross. Is it the coming of that fever? Today's been a week since I left the building. Push the button to cross the street - afterwards may have touched my face.

[00:08:10] I doubt it. More probably some minor flush of stress, momentary, unthreatening. I cling to probability like a religion like eating one mind candle after another till the night is a burning church till it's the day. Thanks.

[00:08:31] Peggy

Okay, so we still can't, now we can't see or hear Glenda.

[00:08:37] Glenda

You can't hear me?

[00:08:39] Peggy
Oh, I can hear you now.

[00:08:41] Glenda
I can see me and I can see my picture. I don't know.

[00:08:45] Peggy
You can see, Katie, you're saying you can see you can see Glenda. All right, I guess it's just meant for me not to see Glenda fine, but I can hear you. So welcome, Glenda.

[00:09:03] Glenda
I'm going to start with some tributes. This one's to the first person I lost to Covid. "Hummingbird, to read to Marcelo." Female hummingbird lived for 11 days on her ventilator. Separated from her family by Covid-19, and the plate glass window of the ICU - until the doctor said it could be removed good news. In fact a small miracle that allowed her to breathe on her own for the few short hours left to her before she folded her wings against her tiny body for the final time. He who had been the center of her family was now painfully plucked out, leaving the middle raw and empty. The small hummingbird who had steward her flock of 10 children along the seemingly endless dusty trails that had led them from Cambodia to Thailand, had then stayed them by her sure will through the long hard year, in the time [indiscernable]. She who solely driven by her desire to keep them alive long enough to reach the shores of America where safety could finally enter their small vocabularies. In the [indiscernable] for spring that cruelty

[00:10:19] of the impatient immigration officer refused to believe that the devastation she had endured caused her to forget the birthdays of herself and her children.

[00:10:34] But her memories had to be sacrificed nor would he ever understand that his solution to merely line the children up by height and assigned them random ages and consider birthdays in the month of January would become an immovable wedge between her and her soon-to-be Americanized children. She had spent the rest of her life cleaning casinos, and hovering over them throughout their childhoods. She raised and sustained her large group never losing a one, and now she's tired. How small the hummingbird looked in her immense hospital bed. Here, she would open and close her needle beak to speak for the last time that long ago language of her childhood village, the language of her return to weightlessness.

[00:11:26] So quiet. Okay. Now I just have a couple short pieces that I want to do for George Floyd. Everything feels nearly broken at this juncture in history, as much as it feels like nothing has changed except the uniforms of the current executioners. A new country filled with so much potential produced nothing but squandered and pillage dreams for its darkest people.

[00:11:58] "The Rise for George Floyd." I think about the times I was kept down because I didn't smile enough. I think about the times I was lifted up because I wasn't like them other ones. I was a good one. It was this twisted compliment that taught me the most powerful lesson of all. That it was not all about the recovery, or the cleverness of the comeback. That it was not just a matter of rising up again that one always must be aware of what one is rising on. That it is perfectly permissible to stand on the shoulders of one's brother, but never under any circumstances, would it ever be deemed permissible to stand upon his neck.

[00:12:46] "Fishwife." If only I could mend this last day of April sky, my hands gray and dingy from overwashing, slipped into stiff gloves sewn by in a city's tailor, accented with matching mask. I step from shelter in these awkward garments unfit for motherly approval, perhaps into my grave. Across the street my elderly neighbor sits at the edge of the lawn scaling a fish, her only company a portable oxygen tank. She gestures hello with her knife, as scales slip softly into her lap nestled there they mirror the comfort of the old stories where everyone was saved.

[00:13:35] "Trees." There's a plantation house that sits between two stands of oak trees that form an alley where the ground. [Sound cuts out.]

[00:13:49] Near the slave cabins abandoned by the persecuted who disappeared into those shadows. I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge of that road, but don't be fooled. This isn't a southern poem. This is not somewhere else, but here. Our government moving closer to its own truth and dread for it has its own way of making people disappear. I won't tell you where this place is this dark mesh of woods, illuminated by ghost ridden strips of light left there by burned crosses. This lynch man's paradise. I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear. I won't tell you where it is. So why do I tell you anything at all? Because you still listen, because in times like these to have you listen at all, it's necessary to depict crosses as innocent trees. Okay.

[00:14:52] "I Saved an Ant." If I told you that today I saved an ant, would you tell me that I did nothing? That I wasted my time, and that now I am wasting yours. Or would you find me heroic? Friend to all creatures, none too small to be counted. Would I make the morning papers? When an ant saved a human he got a movie deal. Are my actions not worthy of such celebrity? The superhero business must be difficult during this time of shelter in place. Are they considered essential? Eligible for stimulus check? Now at this time in human history when saving has been redefined as staying distant from your own kind. In the past, I could not fathom life without companions. I also could not fathom our current definition that staying physically distant it is what constitutes a good friend. I was always taught that you must go often in to the homes of your friends, or weeds would then choke the path. This philosophy has been flipped on its head. Now going to the homes of your friends could cause them to choke on their weed and eventually wound up on a ventilator.

[00:16:03] Social distancing mandates that we not get too close to other people. Is this what is meant when they speak of closeness and disappointment? I'm currently finding great disappointment in those that come close to me without permission. My need for personal space that is safe 72 inches has put a strain on my concept of personal intimacy. I fear that the childhood belief that everyone has

cooties has passed. I remember playing that game, cootie, as a child and imagining that those creatures in microscopic form were crawling all over everyone. The object of the game was to build a bug. I always thought that learning how to get rid of them would have been time better spent. I thought childhood games and stories were supposed to be filled with moral lessons that would prove useful in adulthood. I suppose some evil genius probably benefited from learning how to build a super bug, but I have to say that lesson was definitely lost on me.

[00:17:06] "I am the Tree." I am from those moments that occurred before I budded from the family tree. The moment when ancestors believed that Clorox on skin elevated status. Now the most elevated person believes Clorox can rid the body of that which rots is from the inside. I, the descendant, believe that both of these pandemics cannot be bleached away as the rest of our whitewashed history has been. Slavery was mass incarceration. Synonyms for enslave include shackle, imprison and incarcerate. Bleach serves only as a cover-up, a concealer. It does nothing to address the stain. A stain of this magnitude can no longer be concealed or dyed, simply to become more pleasing to the eye. Nor does satisfy the color wheels palette it is time to hang our nation's truth on the clothesline without alteration for the world to see see our shameful stains.

[00:18:14] "Jagged." Having just risen to another day of self-imposed isolation. I stare down the empty street, energized and defeated in the brisk and shallow restlessness of my early spring. I think of her her ebony fist punching the air, the toe of her sneaker flicking the gravel, her tongue a red fire ignite... [sound cuts out.]

[00:18:43] There is only one question - how to love this woman. I think of her rising like a black jagged dragon, to sharpen her claws against the silence of the trees. Dazzling in her darkness. All day I think of her breathing and tasting her white teeth her sensuous lips her perfect love that left me scarred.

[00:19:09] "John Lewis Love Letter." The highest calling of my heart longs for an answer. I moved towards passion, causes it to flutter and fluctuate. When historians write of me, I want them to say she walked with her face in the wind, not through a mere zephyr, but a category 5 hurricane and could not be stopped until she heard the bell of freedom ringing over the land. And when I pick up my pen to write the truce of my own generation, to document my commitment to struggle, it will be a love song to those heavy inherited burdens that kept me tied to the land. Even when escape would have been more merciful knowing when I leave this earth in the arms of the spirit of peace. I will be flown to my maker on the wings of the everlasting power of love.

[00:20:03] "Methodology." This reminds me of friends that were set to move in together in July before the pandemic. They decided they couldn't stand to be separated during the stay at home order. So they took up residence together. Nothing has been moved from the vacated apartment it sits there as a life raft. The world is on tilt causing high anxiety and big decisions have been put to the back burners. This takes me back to the days of paying two rents and too many times allowing that to be the deciding factor of living together, the the economics of love. Seemed there was nothing alive that I didn't pay for one way or another. That is until my wife broke this pattern. She clearly defined that since we were paying mortgages on appreciating assets - there was no hurry. But, more importantly

since we met in church there was only one course of action - marriage. This maneuver was to be methodically executed with love and precision. 24 years later, I cannot argue with her methodology.

[00:21:14] "Racial Tourism." Before I get to the simple statistic of how many have been stricken by the pandemic of institutionalized racism. I must acknowledge that the art of crafting a number will not explain why so many have been maimed, institutionalized or killed as a tribute. Can we travel back to the beginning in search of a time before hatred? How far would we have to journey? Does such a place exist? Is fantasy the only safe haven for such non-plausible thought? Is this the meaning of a time before the beginning of time? Does this involve geography? Is there a place before time a safety weary travelers that just want to witness and observe true racial harmony without polluting it by our very existence? And then I have my last one that have to read for Miss Peggy, since yes, my birthday's on Valentine's Day, which means tomorrow's my half birthday. So I had to read my birthday poem to close. The Tuesdays and Wednesdays of my current life are Zoom free days. They are a weekend planted firmly

[00:22:26] in the middle of the week. On those days, I usually eat a tuna sandwich, but this week was different. On Tuesday I had an honest-to-goodness Taco Tuesday, and then Wednesday, I jazzed things up by slapping pepper jack cheese and tomato from the vine between two slices. And just to shake things up even further, Wednesday night I skipped both dinner and TV. Then I bought a turkey breast that I intended to eat now, instead of saving for the holidays. This small act of rebellion is totally justified, I assure you. It is a chance for revenge, a chance to at last, at long last thumb my nose at the holidays. That they have done to me being born on a holiday make [sound cuts out].

[00:23:11] Ever knowing what it's like to play first chair. I will never know what it feels like to have a special day all my own, with all eyes on me. Instead, I have been reduced to someone expected to step off the path, to wait my turn, to pick another day more convenient for everyone to congregate. Most of these requests begin with a syrupy do be a dear and end with a not-so-subtle hint of annoyance. Don't try to humor me with stories of birthdays spent alone, or forgotten. I will only assault you verbally with shouts of protest for ruining my image of a perfect birthday spent on an ordinary Tuesday or Wednesday smack-dab in the middle of the week with nary a holiday in sight. Thank you.

[00:24:04] Peggy
Happy half-birthday, Glenda. You deserve it every day of the year.

[00:24:11] Glenda
Happy birthday to you.

[00:24:14] Peggy
Thank you. We're 1960 babies. I joke that I've been waiting 60 years for this. Okay. Thank you so much. And Glenda does have another obligation tonight. So she's going to slip away, but we'll get her back another time. I'm just so glad that, especially with the pieces that she's been writing during these times, that she was able to join us tonight because they're very important and they're words that need to be heard. Thank you.

[00:24:50] Next we're going to hear from Lyn Coffin and then we'll do our our next open mic. Lyn was supposed to read a long time ago and something happened, and then we all know what happened after that. But she joins us tonight. With over 30 published books to her name. Her latest book of translations, Three Centuries, Three Georgian Poets, was published by Adelaide Books in New York last fall (2019). Her new and collected poems was published by Transcendent Zero Press. Her plays have been performed in Malaysia, Singapore and on off-off Broadway, as well as in Boston, Detroit and Seattle. Her translation of Shota Rustaveli's (which I'm sure pronounced wrong) The Knight in the Panther Skin won a Saba Award in 2017, the country of Georgia's highest literary award. She was one of the editors of Last Bench's Protest Anthology. Her last live reading was at C & P Coffee House in West Seattle. Welcome, Lyn.

[00:26:02] Audience Member
You're muted.

[00:26:03] Lyn

There we go. I got it. Okay, so I thought what I would start with I like Glenda's poem about the family in the inherentence. So I'm going to start by reading a poem that I read as a city council Wordsworth poet and it was one of my happiest moments to read this poem to the city council and I got a good reception. It's, and it's called, "The Reception Line." Last night I dreamt about Aunt Percy, this funky alcoholic I so loved for being who she was: funny and flawed. Leaving a bar one night when she was young, she rammed her car into a back road bridge abutment then made her way in heels to the closest farm and called the police complaining that someone had moved the bridge. Aunt Percy old was in my dream's reception line - she offered apricots cold and sweet. "Aunt Percy," I said "you look wonderful." "But thin," she said, "and it wasn't good. A question came up someone in the family needed immediate help." "Don't worry," I said which is almost always a mistake. I think dream talking with the dead may

[00:27:25] be a sign my own death is not far off, and there's little time left for me to tell it like I think it is, which is the farthest honesty can take us while we breathe. In the dream. I spoke to my father and was glad to see him looking well. The last real time was in the Scottsdale hospital. I went in as soon as the nurses were done with bathing, and shaving, and feeding him. Garbled as he was, he got out my name and reminded me something about faith and cold. I rubbed his feet till he signaled me to stop. Left a picture of my mother by his bed, and walked back to his nearby empty house. I was hardly in the door when the hospital called. In the dream, my father too was standing in the reception line. He looked happy and healthy. I was glad to see him then added speaking from someplace deeper than memory. "You're my father among other things." When I woke up I knew my father's love was like a ship, and the ship wrecked and went down. And, wood floated to the shore of the island of my life, and I picked up all

[00:28:52] the timber I could, and used it for fires when the nights were cold. When we die, it doesn't matter what we had only what we did. You may, like me, be so close to the edge your feet are

beginning to get cold. Your dead too, may have formed a reception line. So many of our family need immediate help.

[00:29:28] Next I'd like to read a, thank you, to read a couple of new poems. This is a poem that [pages rustle]

[00:29:41] is you know, I have a one, sort of I think of as a major or at least a poem about Covid and one about racism. And sort of, I put the other ones aside because I think these two. So this is called, "The Sword in the Stone." Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. This childhood rhyme is the epigraph. 1950. Roslin Estates. Dusk. A streetlight with an insect halo, me six years old crouched in a roadside bush, at the edge of our sea green, just leveled lawn. Mallets for croquet propped against the oak tree waiting for the next family game. She, a grown-up darker than her coat, head bent, come slow as molasses down the street. She stops in front of me for a heart thudding second then she walks by. And I call the name out. Throw it at her retreating back. And she turns, and in her turning, sucks the air from the sky with her piano face. With her marble eyes, she sees me. I turn and run back to the house, out of memory's frame. And the name I threw, is sunk like a sword in the cold black stone, of an Anglo myth, lying at the bottom of a murky pond.

[00:31:38] That's a true experience, and I'm very interested in this whole concept. When I gave a reading at my school where I went to boarding school, Miss Halls, and I talked about this incident, I hadn't written the poem, but I talked about the incident. And, afterwards I got a letter from the students and they were very complimentary and saying how much they liked my writing. But the whole class had signed, the students writing saying that I was mistaken - I was wrong to have used the n-word. And so it was I wish that they had brought it up at the time - we could have had a good discussion. But anyway, it was a very revealing for me all the attitudes and the controversy around that. Okay, this has an epigraph, a true story, which I love. I was researching slugs and snails for some reason. And I came across a true story achatina, a South African desert snail, glued to a card in the British museum in 1846 emerged from its shell and crawled off happily into the distance, four years later when exposed to a

[00:32:58] little moisture. So that's the epigraph and this is called, "Snails and Zombies." It's for Hugh. You, a widower, I a widow, friends at first sight. For more than a month both residents of a retirement home four long blocks away, sit at opposite ends of a bench in the park and watch a toddler some yards off negotiate the distance from dad to mom, and back to dad. Half on hands and knees, half on the staggering legs of some Saturday morning cartoon zombie. Arms stiffly extended in front, as if to welcome insubstantial air. Dad produces a ball and rolls it, the toddler watches it come within reach, and graces the ball with a full-body pounce. He takes the Star-Spangled ball between his pudgy, patty cake hands and manages to throw or drop it. So it rolls [indiscernable] in the ragged grass. "Well," says Dad calling to us, seeing us as grandparents stand-in perhaps, "what an arm on this one, huh?" He says, and we adrift in the space beyond 70, wearing masks against the likeliest form of the lethal unseen. We nod emphatically and clap.

[00:34:39] Mom picks up the toddler, dad gets the ball. They gather around the wavy tail dachshund leashed to the stroller. The toddler is stowed, Mom and Dad smile and off they go. We lower our masks. Unable to touch, or say very much of the rest of the little we know. We sit at opposite ends of a bench in the park, drinking ice tea and sharing a sandwich briefly basking in a borrowed sun. I think I'm going to end there, make it short so we can keep on schedule. Thank you.

[00:35:23] Peggy

So glad you could join us tonight. It was looking a little iffy for Lyn earlier this week. So welcome. Now. I'm delighted to welcome a newcomer tonight to our open mic line up. Jeff Katrell.

[00:35:40] Jeff

Hi. Can you hear me?

[00:35:42] Peggy

Yes!

[00:35:43] Jeff

Okay. I'm new to the WebEx thing too. Um, okay. So the piece I'm going to read is kind of an alternative to traditional love poems because nowadays I find it's, it's really hard to write a sincere love poem without it ending in a restraining order. So this is a poem about just liking someone. It's called, "Like Poem." Some writers say

[00:36:08] words can't express their love. Well, I don't love you, I merely like you, and surely words are good enough for that. I like you. You are kind of neat to hang out with but only in small doses. Not a lot. You're a swell opponent for a game of Risk or Clue or Cards Against Humanity. I'd watch a movie with you. Nothing great, not Casablanca or The Seventh Seal, but maybe that last Matrix film. Let's say I'd never have sex with you, nor would I go on a long trip with you? Because I get quite sick of you after a day or two, but we know it would never come to that. Shall I compare thee to a plate of macaroni and cheese? I like mac and cheese. It's a nice lunch snack. It'll do when you just don't have time to bake. If you eat too much, you may get indigestion or dysentery or maybe even worms. That's more or less how I feel about you. How do I like thee? Let me count the ways. One, two. Yeah, two - that sounds about right, two. [sings] "Like me mildly, like me bland, think I'm a-okay. Say hello, and shake my

[00:37:30] hand and stay six feet away." [ends singing] Oh, my like is not a red red rose, but more a short stubby dandelion, which gets often the mower on a Saturday morning. Oh, my like is like a melody but not one by Mozart, or a Tchaikovsky, more like a 1980s pop hit; catchy and sweet yet vastly disposable like something by Mister Mister, or Paul Young, or Level 42, or The Barge, or Wang Chung. Wait, you don't remember that? Exactly! [sings] "When a man likes a person. Things still sort of carry on. He might bum a smoke or maybe lend five bucks to you. If you're mad, he'll tend to notice, and then he'll stop liking you, turn his back on you and delete you from social media." [singing ends] Love means never having to say you're sorry, but like means never having to say, I love you. Roses are red. Violets are blue. AstroTurf is a worthy practical substitute for the real thing and so are

you. Now actually, I don't like AstroTurf and come to think of it, I don't like you! No, you're annoying and you smell bad too! Go away! Thank you. That was, "Like Poem."

[00:39:04] Peggy

Thank you very much. Welcome.!Okay, I'm wondering, oh Minnie Collins - long time no see! Benjamin / Euphrates, are you out there? Has our other reader arrived under another name? If so reveal yourself. I'm afraid not. Kevin - let's go to you for the next open mic, please.

[00:39:35] Kevin

Okay, we have a short one called, "Subconscious Desire and Misplaced Lifelines."

[00:39:44] "Rene and Georgette Magritte with Their Dog After the War" an insertion of the subconscious desire held between thoughts. I've been thinking about the letters since I found it, and keep wondering what I was thinking. I suppose I finally got my breath back. So I didn't recognize the lifeline. Now I've got all the breath I can handle, just in time to hold it in for a while. Lifelines are slack for the duration and assertion of a subconscious desire arguing with itself. "Rene and Georgette Magritte with Their Dog After the War" are an artifact left over from long before I had trouble breathing. Thank you.

[00:40:32] Peggy

Well, I'm hoping that we haven't lost our other reader especially since Lyn - you kind of cut yourself off. [laughs] You cut yourself- we could always come back to you. So I'd like to now welcome Loreen Lilyn Lee. I remember some years ago when she first did some of the reading from her new memoir and so it's really been an honor to watch it in progress, and see her success in the publishing world. So Loreen Lilyn Lee is a Seattle writer born and raised in pre-statehood Honolulu. She moved to Seattle in 1986, when computers were just being introduced into the workplace. Her debut book *The Lava Never Sleeps: A Honolulu Memoir* won the 2018 Willow Books Literature Award in prose. She has received fellowships for a Hedgebrook residency and the year-long Jack Straw Writers Program. When not writing, she tutors English and writing at North Seattle College. She looks forward to resuming her pre-pandemic life of lingering in public libraries and bookstores, playing Mahjong, going to the movies and attending various

[00:41:49] performances live, not live-streaming. She is grateful for a life surrounded by the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest and creative communities in this UNESCO City of Literature. Loreen Lee! Welcome, Loreen.

[00:42:08] Loreen

Thank you again for tonight, and to the Seattle Public Library for hosting us. As Peggy said I have been to It's About Time over the years, sharing excerpts from my memoir. And, if you can see me, I'm going to hold up the cover of my book that was published in, published last year actually, so I'm really pleased that it's in the world. And this is a photo of me, if you can see it, when I was three years old and my mother made my skirt out of tea leaves that she picked from plants in our yard. I don't remember the whole performance or anything. But I remember watching her make my skirt and that

you know, that was something I didn't remember until this photo and this book came out. So that was a nice memory to retrieve. I'm going to start with a Hawaiian canoe chant. And then I'm going to read the prologue

[00:43:18] from the memoir. And then an essay, I wrote earlier this year about my book, and what it was like, what it's like to be an author in 2019. So. Ancient Hawaiians understood the importance of community. Everyone in the canoe knows they must work together in order to move forward for the good of all. Here's the chant [Speaks in Hawaiian] This is the translation: Together we pull. Together we draw. Together now and forever, unceasingly from the top. Pull. Persevere. [Hawaiian word] means persevere, and that's a really good word to remember as we spend our days wondering where, when the quarantine is going to end.

[00:44:30] So the beginning of the book opens like this. A preseminar crowd was buzzing with friendly chatter, as I registered got my name tag, then navigated my way into the ballroom. I looked attractive and confident but, my shoulder length hair permed into waves, my makeup including false eyelashes, and my silk outfit disguised my true feelings. I felt dishelved and aimless, like a homeless bag lady. The chairs in this Waikiki Hotel Ballroom were arranged theater-style perhaps 200 or more facing a platform where the two seminar leaders held our attention. They were 30 something vibrant and charismatic. His premature silver white trimmed mane, contrasted with her reddish-auburn curls, reminding me of ice and fire. This husband and wife team leaders of a small spiritual community on the island conducted exercises, instructing us to close our eyes and breathe deeply, relax and connect to a memory. At the end of one of these exercises, they invited people to share. Some people raise their hands and

[00:45:53] spoke. I raised my hand. When I stood I suddenly reached out for the chair in front of me and clutched it, hard. I heard a piercing cry fill the room. I looked around it was coming for me, from some place deep inside that I didn't know existed. The sound of old pain and anger erupted from my body, an uncontrollable primal scream.

[00:46:29] This essay is entitled, "2019: The Year of the Book." You have a physical product of your work to be able to hold it in your hand is a Hallelujah moment for a writer. All the darkness and ill feelings in the world fall away, and only light remains. As I held my book for the first time, and read the title, The Lava Never Sleeps: A Honolulu Memoir, the letters in the title seemed to glow. At the same time the fear and anxiety were absolutely real. It's one thing [indiscernable] a book and quite another to put your face and body in public spaces to declare - yes, this is my story. My work. I claim it. You don't know if people will like it. You don't know if anyone will show up. If they do, will they buy a book? So I am very grateful people did show up and grateful to my writing community and friends near and far: tutoring colleagues at North Seattle College, Tai Chi and Mahjong friends, neighbors, decades-long friends, high school classmates. To all those I will never meet, whoever picked up my book, thank you. I appeared in

[00:47:58] 16 events between March and October 2019 in New York City and the Bronx, Seattle and Portland, Santa Barbara, Kahului and Honolulu and people came and they bought books. They paid

their good money for my words, my stories. As a new author it's an indescribable feeling. Yes validation. Yes acceptance. Also, I felt visible in a new way. People came, they saw me, they listened, they got me and my words. Because I have felt invisible and voiceless most of my life, this year of the book gave me a pathway for seeing myself newly too. It felt like a growth spurt. Well, our bodies are always changing, 2019 was evolutionary. Cellular and emotional levels. I felt different in my skin. This body was not the same as the one before publication. Have I grown into a true version of myself? Not sure, but I have a sense of being more authentic, having more authority over my life than ever before. If people make the effort to be in the room, I feel an obligation to deliver something of myself, something of value.

[00:49:30] I read excerpts, talk about some things in the book, and why I was compelled to write this memoir. I practiced an ancient Hawaiian knut chance to invoke my cultural roots and values. The words pull everyone and the room together, to connect them. Sharing myself and my words have been self-affirming. It's not just talking about myself to a room full of people. It's not just stepping out of my comfort zone, which is usually backstage, not center stage. As I read excerpts, I gained a new appreciation for the work, for the words, for the time invested. In writing and examining the darker chapters of my memoir were powerful acts that gave me clarity on how I, and other women, so often assume both blame and shame. BS in my personal shorthand. For men's bad behavior, for any kind of abuse. In telling my stories, in being willing to be as honest as possible, I discovered this BS didn't belong on my shoulders - in my body. They had tied up my tongue, silencing me in a cycle of hurt. Instead, they belong to the men in my life - to a system

[00:50:52] that abuses and oppresses women. When women tell their stories as in #MeToo, they give other women the chance to recognize these twin instincts of BS belong elsewhere. To proclaim, no! These are not mine. I did nothing wrong. Letting them go is liberating. We women can stand tall, unburdened by such false virtues. Perhaps, I haven't experienced a growth spurt so much as I am standing taller. Feeling more at peace after laying down my shame and blame on the page and releasing them. Writer, Rita Mae Brown says, "writers are the moral purifiers of culture. We may not be pure ourselves. But we must tell the truth, which is a purifying act. When writers know the truth they often struggle about telling it. If they do, their turmoil may not end immediately. However telling the truth is an opportunity for being cleansed and made whole. This can ripple out into society." Journalist like Meg Twohey, Jodi Kantor, and Ronan Farrow exemplify Brown's words. Their relentless pursuit

[00:52:19] to reveal the truth about Harvey Weinstein, and the sexual harassment and assault of women opened up the ugly truth about rich and powerful men. Their articles started a global movement of women who have experienced unwanted sexual advances, intimidation, and long-term damage. Such predatory men's behavior will not change overnight, nor will all these men be exposed and prosecuted. However, their victims can come forward to tell their stories, their truth and hopefully be healed. To know they are not alone, did nothing wrong, and let go of any shame and blame they have harbored. The best kind of storytelling connects people, holds the mirror that reflects some truth and their own lives and offer validation. I received a letter from a reader. She wrote, "What struck me most was the sense I got of holding a well digested life in my hands. There was a reality and the

completeness to the book, as a whole, that really impressed me. You have sifted through and sorted it out, and understood the implications and consequences

[00:53:37] and internalized as lessons. And then you shared it. Your book inspired me to take another look at my journals and dig a little deeper than I have already for the nuggets of wisdom that the painful parts have to offer. Another highlight came when a woman of color told me how gratifying it was for her to look at the front of the room and see me, someone who looks like her.

[00:54:08] Moments like these make me want to do better - to keep writing and publishing, to be even more of who I am, making a space for others to be taller and truer. Surely, this is why we are here.

[00:54:28] Thank you very much for joining me tonight. My final word to you is [speaks a Hawaiian word], persevere no matter what's going on in your life. Remember, [speaks a Hawaiian word].

[00:54:42] Peggy

[speaks Hawaiian word] Thank you. I love that expression you gave us, you know, the year of the book and how it changed you. So let us all, whatever this year becomes for us, let us also perhaps see what it sponds in the way of books and literature, and a future that's more grounded - more bright, so. Lovely, lovely reading thank you. Lyn had to leave us because I think she was afraid that the voice on her computer that says the time - she left right before seven because she can't turn off the voice that gives the time. And, I didn't hear or find out what happened to our other reader tonight, Euphrates Moss. So would anyone else like to give us a soft opening for a final open mic or two? Rahzel, thank you.

[00:55:45] Rahzel

I can't tell - oh I am. This is called, "Thunder." A quick flash, bolt of heat expands the air. Thunder catches some of us unaware. Here where flashbangs used to be rare, dangerous light. It's bright hot limbs just there, cracks, rumbles from an ending oppression. We were here. A quick flash, bolts of heat expands the air. When we violently rest, what we should share - the touch, that surge is unmistakably severe. Here where flashbangs used to be rare. Appropriate darkness descends like prayer, then rubber bullets and grenades rip and sear. Here where flashbangs used to be rare. When fingers meet, there's a blinding flare. An exploding blast ball stops a heart, right here. A quick flash bolt of heat expands the air. Voices echoing through years declare - It's past time for justice, equity - might reckoning be near? A quick flash, bolt of heat expands the air. Here where flashbangs are no longer rare. I forgot to mention. It's a villanelle. So that was the repeating lines.

[00:57:25] Peggy

I was going to mention that's one of Rahzel's, I think it's our first vilanelle.

[00:57:29] Rahzel

My first yeah, no longer a villanelle virgin.

[00:57:33] Peggy

No, and perhaps unfortunate, but it's as though you had cued the sirens in the background. For the flashbangs and unfortunately the counterpoint to so much of what's been going on and Seattle recently. So, thank you so much anyone else? Mary Ellen

[00:58:07] Mary Ellen

[Laughter] Thank you. Thank you. This is a duplex poem that will be in my chapbook that's coming out in October from Finishing Line Press and it's called "Postcards from the Lilac City." Spokane, Washington is my hometown and it's the Lilac City that usually has a Lilac Festival/Parade in May. The duplex. We had a real Fred and Ethel in the Lilac City and I Love Lucy was on CBS 1951 to 1967. Fred and Ethel Mertz shot primetime ridicule. Lucy and Ricky Ricardo bantered lots. Battered, bantered lots in black and white TV we watched. Weekly comic pratfalls and damn gender roles. Damn gender roles, they argued which was harder swapped for burnt ironing and failure aprons. Failure aprons as husbands ruined kitchens, wives wrapped chocolates on a job conveyor belt. Conveyor belt raced by and wives got fired. Our house with troubled Fred and Ethel chuckled. They chuckle long past their own squabbles, a little worse for wear, their family down time. Family down time watching comedy routines swapped quarrels for shots of primetime laughter.

[01:00:12] And I'll do one other little short one from this summer, "Preparing a Picnic." Standing on a stool next to the kitchen sink, the six-year-old pries the stem from red ripe strawberries. She helped pick from her grandparents garden. Then she reaches forward to rinse each perfection under the faucet, and pops baby berries into her mouth savoring the taste of the smallest, she has christened as newborns. Thank you.

[01:01:09] Peggy

That was lovely. Okay, I'm going... anybody else? Looking for a little way.

[01:01:18] It is really been such a delight to have such a great turnout. This is by far, you know, double the people that we've had, you know in our first couple of months. And, I love seeing new faces, and I hope that that means that we will see you again. Even when we were moving about the world as many people that I haven't seen for too long, talking to you Minnie Collins. So it's just a pleasure to see your names and people that we've connected with to the collage because if the people who've been reading over the last couple of months, so we're making it work. Now I can invite you to, if you want, you know, unmute. You can even you know, no chairs need to be loaded. Oh, do I hear another voice? No chairs need to be loaded or stacked up, but you are welcome to either chat or you know, ask questions of each other. Thank you so much all the open mic people, and our readers tonight.