



# Library podcast

## Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #388

### 00:00:01 Lynn Miller

So this, so it's about time writers reading series was founded by Esther Altshul Helfgott, who curated it for the first 30 years and dedicated to the memory of Anna Helfgott who began writing at age 70, and to the memory of Nelson Bentley, the quintessential teacher who gave Anna and scores of others help and hope. It's dedicated to the end of racism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, homelessness and war. Our first reader tonight will be Benjamin Schmidt. Benjamin Schmidt is the author of four books. Most recently, the Saints of Capitalism and Sound Direct to a Fleeting Masculinity. His poems have appeared or forthcoming in. Sojourners, The Antioch Review, The Good Men Project, Hobart, Columbia Review, Spillway and others. A co-founder of Pacifica Writers Workshop. He has also written articles for the Seattle Times and at The Inkwell. He lives in Seattle with his wife and children. Okay. Welcome Benjamin.

### 00:01:11 Benjamin Schmidt

Thank you, Lynn. Thank you. Everyone for attending tonight. It's really good to see everybody. I'm gonna read some poems from my new book, the Saints of Capitalism, and I'm really excited to share them with you. The book came out couple of months ago. Just a background. One of the major themes of the book is capitalism as a religious belief system. And so, the first section of the book is called articles of Faith, kind of, basically, describes the tenants of that religion, so i'm gonna read a poem now called exegesis. Just basically a explanation of a religious text. I write for the insignificant shadows elongated on the warm asphalt of words. I write for the drapes that keep the Sun from entering the rooms of expensive gifts. I write for the violent waves, crashing on the gentle coastal rocks that absorb them. I write for the wind that passes through the eternal entrance that can be slammed shut. I write for the green haired teenager with a feather crushing a semi on her tongue. I write for the ones who hate poetry, for I'm just a gorilla, loving in Sign Language. I write for those who have broken my heart. That's me passed out, drunk between the letters. I write for the lone country light unaware of the darkness breathing down its neck. I write for all the saints of capitalism worshipping at the decrepit altars of long cons.

### 00:02:59 Benjamin Schmidt

And next poem. Thanks. Appreciate it. Thanks. This next poem is called Con-archy. A Con-archy is kind of like a monarchy. It is a system of government, but it's a system of government run by con artists and not monarchs. So, Con-archy. Hustle hustle, con con. Con con, hustle hustle. Hustle hustle, con con. Con con, hustle hustle. Pastor Mike with the con con. Buddy, give me the five dollars

in your wallet and I'll give you \$1 that will transform into the breast of an angel after 90 days. Marlene Kneedler with the hustle hustle. I guarantee your old shoes of gold inside of them. You need to hoard your gold. My dog Sparkles can lick those laces right down to the nuggets. Mad Dog Murphy with the con con. Listen amigo, you need to stop reading books and plant your extra time on the side of a mountain, a grove of saved trees will grow, filled with wood nymphs. Jonathan Clark with the hustle hustle. I know it looks like we gave your job to a robot, Paul, but immigrants stole it. They're climbing out of beer cans. They're invading North Dakota. Rainbow Richards with the con con. Sure. Your professor has a few fancy degrees, but can she tell you how snakes evolved from toothbrushes? How horses are made from snow? Well, Saint Lulu can. Dr. Orchard with the hustle, hustle. Our research proves that staring languidly out of a window for 30 minutes a day can help a person build the meaningful relationships they will have to ruin to get ahead. New website with the con con. Toiletism, a term describing jokes meant to mock a person's bodily functions. Example: making fun of my farts again, Joe? You're such a toiletist. Mary Higgins with the hustle hustle. There's a hot new press marketing poetry collections to drug dealers. Each book is hardcover and contains a space inside the back cover with enough room to hide a stash. The prestigious council with the con con. Don't worry. Aging is no longer relevant to us. You're not getting older. The fat of your paunch will rise upwards to smooth out the wrinkles on your face, Senator Barry with the hustle, hustle. Of course, this is a democracy. We just can't let you vote this year, Aneya. If you vote, that will make it less Democratic for everyone else. Hustle hustle, con con. Con con, hustle hustle. Hustle hustle. con con. Con con, hustle hustle.

**00:05:56 Benjamin Schmidt**

Thank you. And the next section of the book is the title section. So it's the Saints of capitalism and in the book, we're all saints of capitalism because we all live under the system. And so this part examines the lives of all kinds of folks. Rich, poor and everyone in between. And so I'm going to read a poem now called honor. To address me they say "your honor." The robe, the bench, the gavel relics in this Holy Temple of capitalism. And I too am honorable, went to the right schools, succeeded in the right jobs, married the right woman, had the right number of kids, helped the right people, asked the right people to help me. Every door is big enough for honor to pass through. But is mine the honor of the tiger? Or the Zookeeper who feeds him? Where is my honor at 3 a.m., when thoughts shinny to rooftop murders? Where was it the night I held her down and forced her to touch me? Was it honor itself that allowed that night and all the nights after? I have inhaled honor, like the second hand smoke of a cigar while playing golf with senators. Honor is what keeps me in this wealthy community. It means I don't have to shake the hand of anyone who bothers me. Today a disgraced nurse was in my court. She told us that she was ashamed of what she'd done. Her hands were shaking, like in an ancient dance or rite. But what I want to know is where does she get so much honor?

**00:07:42 Benjamin Schmidt**

This is called spider. Crossing a river in Africa, the spider shooting her blacksmith thread of melted down swords and armor. The world's molten madness, bridging, dangling over the water. The creature moves frantically, and to an observer miraculously, like some stressed out downtown commuter levitating to work. Surely this is a phantasmagorical outpouring of mighty engineering. Golden Gate sprung from a thimble that you would never believe if it hadn't bored you in second

grade like the kindness of Jesus Christ. When we wake up, we must scrub our knowledge with wonder every day. We must become stupidly smart, reciting information about toenails excited that they actually exist. See how the web spans the breadth of the river sparkling in the sunlight. Like the grid of a future city this great Cathedral of feasting towers above the current. The spider has toiled on her masterpiece. Intricate painting for the dead to be held. The bugs writhe in the snare. The spider climbed to wrap each of them in the gloom of grace and light. Thank you so much. And this one's called House. Light drowns in clouds sinking down to a suburban street. And in this overcast wreck of sun corpses, pale limbs and faces come to rest outside the houses on this block. Here, gossiping gardens invite you in for conversation. Frank fences don't want to see you around. The house with the red door has a low voice like a Hollywood actress from the 50s. The bright blue house is always talking absent-mindedly about the rocks in her yard. Mary watched it all from her window. She suspects her house looks sad, brown paint mumbling about the slights of the past. Mary herself inside. Her dolor has spread through cup stains and scratches on the plates ever since her boys left her here all alone. Must a house take on the moods of an owner? Surely felicitous houses must contain the morose from time to time. Surely her boys must love her. For all the messes she cleaned with rags and silence. More sun corpses descend. After a few months of hunger, Mary finds herself refreshed in their rotting light. And thank you. The next section of the book is entitled My Auto-hagiography. So, hagiography being a biography of a saint. And all, you know, my autobiography being my own story. This is my own story as a fellow saint of capitalism. I'm going to read a poem now called Wisconsin, because I used to live in Wisconsin. I remember fields so wide they could grow Civil War Reenactors. I remember of the creek that ran through our land, like an old relationship. Banks of familiar yet, perilous adventures, and bridges made from the broken sticks. I remember the woods that still haunt my dreams with shipwreck trunks of Elm and Ash and Oak. pulling the land down into an alien ocean. The Dogwood rising to look me in the eye with a Shakespearean speech of red stems. I remember the seasons that felt closer than the neighbors. Winter had a drinking problem, not waking up to melt the snows till noon. Autumn was a handsome redhead, too shy to tell the girls his feelings until it was too late. Spring was middle-aged, rediscovering herself through yoga, bending and twisting with new life. But her Joy seemed kind of fake. Summer was relaxed, always eating peanuts. Born into wealth, he smokes such long cigars. I remember myself on this land exposed where no one could see me. Not happier, not better. Just trying to find myself lost in the woods. Thanks. This is called Accomplishment. Appreciate, appreciate you. At the park, my daughter climbs to the top of the slide. Her teeth bared tenaciously with something greater than will. Her force of a face pushes its way through, tiny hands grip pieces of plastic, boots find foothold as she scales this pretend peak. On her back I see lines of transformation like national borders imposing a vision upon a continent. When she reaches the top, I cheer her down the slide. She tells herself, good job, and I laugh at the self-congratulation. She climbs a few more times. Skateboarders scrape words from pavement, a basketball bounces, bounces, clangs a giraffe off the rim and bounces again, dogs prance by pulling slavish owners by the leash. What lasting mark will any of us make with our little fists clenched? There is no violence like inertia. The sun finds a way to break through the leaves, catching me with a single ray. And this poem has a term in it that some folks might not be familiar with. The term is Haecceity and it was coined by a medieval Scottish monk philosopher named Duns Scotus. It basically means thisness, it refers to the unique qualities of every object that's separated from every other object in the universe. So, even if you're looking at two chairs that look identical,

according to Duns Scotus, each would be completely different because of its own Haecceity. Its own unique essence. So anyway, I find it to be an interesting idea, and this poem is called Belly. My wife's pregnant belly announces himself at the dinner table. He lets us all know he's very busy and important man with a Brooklyn accent. I'm creating a new life in here. The online reviews are incredible. He's doing extraordinary work. Sometimes I listened outside the studio to the strange noises coming from inside. A chainsaw, a fire extinguisher, an old bike horn. The expectation is thrilling. Still, does he have to be so arrogant? Walking ahead of my wife with his nose up in the air, demanding hamburgers at 4 a.m., pickles dipped in peanut butter for dinner. He exudes an unmistakable air of accomplishment. He's graced the cover of every magazine with that famous essence of futures. But it is not quiddity, that is forming on those long nights. It is Haecceity. The more confident he gets, the more he will diminish as a specific glory unfolds. He is not a shaper of forms. He is just a celebrity sitting in his studio dumbfounded, watching eyelids becoming new. And just one more. And this is from the last section of the book and that section is entitled, The Tyrant Cycle. And it's a poem cycle that describes a historical cycle by which a democratic state would slip into authoritarianism. And it was kind of inspired by a lot of reading I was doing about 4 to 5 years ago. Some patterns I saw in countries in which that had happened. And so anyway each poem in this represents a different phase in that process of slipping into authoritarianism. So I'm going to read number two. This is Modernization/Social Change. In which the unprepared Nation endures a catastrophic event or undergoes a form of modernization that threatens the established order. Did you see a breath blow up the sky? A skyscraper fall to its knees for one final prayer. Did you read the treaty? The government is exporting our waterfalls and importing exotic animals to roam free in the streets. Did you hear what the king said, babbling about mirrors inside his skull? They say he hasn't left his bed in days. Did you speak with the empty bellies, sliding along the sidewalks that torn packaging from a youth that's been devoured? Events brought us to the future. But when I wake up, I noticed the sky appears from the past. It shifted here pulled by needy clouds from the time we like to mythologize. It has stayed with us, as flags felt like veils over driveways and lawns. As the events grew so large, they could fit inside each one of us. Fathers and grandfathers with all their eloquence could not stop the flaming clouds from raining ashen human bodies. Mothers and grandmothers for all their strength, couldn't quite slap the knives from our hands. Thank you very much and I'll put a link to the book if anyone's interested in the chat. That's okay. Thank you.

**00:17:20 Lynn Miller**

Thank you so much Benjamin, please do put links in the chat so that we can find more of what we heard tonight. Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to hear you read. Before we get to our second featured reader, we're going to have have a open mic with Ginger [unclear]. Welcome, Ginger. And you have 3 minutes.

**00:17:47 Ginger**

Thank you. Three minutes. I'm going to read from one of my... I have two chap books. This is the second one. It's called Another Thing Coming: Poems and Stuff. I'm going to read the open dedication, Procrastination. So for today, I've found the way, I need to say just do it. So then again, I take the pen, but in the end, oh screw it. This section is called A Few Thinkettes. Now. I'm I've done this based on Winnie, the Pooh. Did you ever stop to think and then forget to start again? And then

another quote was sometimes I sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits. So those were kind of where I got a lot of my inspiration. These are called A Few Thinkettes. so they're little short ones. Truth. What the Mind thinks the mouth says. What the heart feels the eyes tell. This one is called Mourning. Like m-o-u-r-ning. Wine and tears. Wine and cheese. Wine and laughter. This is called things to make you smile. And the title of the poem is. Let's do it. Let's do it. Okay. Well, let's well, should we? Why should we? Do you really think we ought to? I don't know. Do you think we could? Maybe I could. Could you? Don't know why I couldn't. Yes, I would. You would? Really? Wouldn't you? I would, if you convince me, we should. I wouldn't unless you could. Well I would if I could with you. And I would, if I could with you. Would you? Okay. Let's do it. Oh, I really shouldn't. This is called Morning Dance. And I also call it kind of a poem. It's... it just came to me one time. Morning Dance (and this is morning, like, early morning). Good morning said sound playfully. Silence stirred, blinked open her eyes. Such exuberance, she thought as she started to awaken. Sound, having been awake since time began, bounded gaily among the wildflowers as she's saying, "it's time to play, to ride the wind. Accompany me so I can sing." Silence rose up slowly, collected her skirts about her and prepared to take the hand of Sound. "Ready?" chirped Sound. "Sigh," breathed Silence. They hopped up, landed on the wind waves and rode off hand-in-hand. Sound was singing in all directions. Silence played her accompanying role, but all the, while she was dreaming to herself of winter time. "In winter time," she smiled, "I will again be able to hear the beautiful Silence of a snowflake falling."

**00:22:07 Lynn Miller**

Thank you so much, Ginger. That was really great. And I really appreciate you jumping in and doing Open Mic. Thank you so much.

**00:22:17 Ginger**

I appreciate the opportunity.

**00:22:20 Lynn Miller**

Yeah, it's a great pleasure. We are going to have our second featured reader. Now. I'll introduce her. Anna Dahland writes about immigration, parenting and identity. She teaches English as a second language and academic writing at North Seattle College and Edmonds College, and is co-author of several textbooks. She is a former professor of English education at Chonnam National University in South Korea, a child, immigrant parent and foster parent. Anna is currently writing a three-part motherhood and identity memoir series. The next book in the series, Almost Korean, chronicles 15 years of living in South Korea, where she married, raised children and adopted children. It is slated for publication in late 2022. Known as Anna Kim to her students, Anna lives and works from her home in Shoreline, Washington. So, welcome Anna. Please take it away.

**00:23:25 Anna Dahland**

Thank you so much. I'm kind of glad that that intro was kind of long because I was sitting here thinking about how to intro this reading. This comes from the first, in what I hope is going to be a series. It's called Swedish Again: A Memoir of Motherhood and Identity. And I have to take the first minute of my time to set up the situation because it's rather complex. I was a single mother of five that were teenagers. And and I met a guy who was a single father of six. And we decided it would be a

great idea to get married. So he lived in Sweden, which was where I had been a child immigrant from, I grew up in America. I'm American. The only claim to fame about Sweden was that my mother had forced me to speak the language. So I was fluent in Swedish. So we he moved his crew to Seattle. This was in 2010 and then didn't like it, didn't like me, didn't want to stay and puff the marriage was over. He moved back to Sweden and then didn't want me to have contact with his six kids. Which broke my heart. Fast forward ... we're getting there. Fast forward to four years later. I got a phone call that he was dying. He got cancer and the kids turned to me. And that's where the book opens. Like. Okay. I'm a empty nester. I just became an empty nester. And now these kids are calling me. So I went back to Sweden thinking that I would stay for 90 days and then Life happened. Okay. So this I'm going to read three stories out of this book that are kind of self standing, but keeping in mind, I had mixed feelings about my ex about even having divorced him and I walked into his house and he's already passed away and I'm taking care of his kids. And the first scene is from the second day that I'm there. In this book, my ex is called Kevin and he's got seven kids Milling around. So I'm going to be three short episodes from this having to do with being back with the kids and also being back in this country where I had not lived since I was a child. After everyone ate lunch, I tried to do my part and clean up. The dishes clinked in the soapy water, and sunshine streamed into the kitchen window. The smell of the soap, the gleam of the stainless-steel counters, the knives hanging from a sturdy, magnetic strip above the sink, the striped blue-and-white pattern on the dishcloth. They took me back. And again, I expected my husband to sneak up behind me and wrap his arms around my waist, and snuggle into the nape of my neck with his prickly beard. Last time I stood here, I thought I was happy. I had 11 children and looked forward to a future in a big house together. How could a person flip like that? How could a marriage just explode like that? I heard footsteps behind me, and then his voice. The lilting Irish Swedish accent, from slightly above my head. The gentle push of masculinity to remind the world he was a force to be reckoned with and a charmer. No need to do that. We'll take care of it. My hands froze in the suds and my eyes filled with tears. I turned and it was Sean. If the rest of the kids caused flickers of his dad, here was the man himself and now he kept his cool, just like his dad. He turned on the charm and smiled down at me. Now. We'll have nothing of that here. No crying on the premises. And I burst. It was my husband all over again. Same exact expression. The man I had instinctively held onto through his T-shirt at the airport. Even after we had signed the papers saying we would be nothing to each other again. It was him right here, right now. Except it wasn't. It was a 19 year old kid, and my sudden emotion alarmed him. I wiped my eye with my shoulder. Sorry, it's just a bit much. I turned back to the dishes, but my eyes kept pouring tears Sure it was fun to eat my childhood foods and reconnect with my kids, but this was a place of death and painful memories. What was I doing here? The second story has to do with the fact that I needed to find a job. And I had a friend who was a friend of that family, who was one of these friends, that kind of sweeps into the day and solves your problems. Okay, her name is Marie. Almost everyone in Sweden spoke some degree of English, and many people were fluent. However, to get a job in Sweden and function in the workplace, the newly-arrived needed proficiency in the Swedish language. With the sudden influx of immigrants in the last few months, the system was in desperate need of teachers. Enter Marie's next brilliant idea. "Teach Swedish! It's perfect!" I reminded her that I had gone to Swedish school for exactly one week, the first grade in 1969. "Doesn't matter. You have a master's in teaching and you're a native speaker of Swedish. It's perfect." The director who interviewed me at the school thought it was perfect too. I became a substitute for Marie's class the

very next week and soon had my own class to teach. I smiled and said it was great. But when Marie wasn't around, I confessed the truth on the phone to my mom. "It's the world's worst job, Mom." In

### **00:30:33 Anna Dahland**

my whole professional life, I've never had anything like it. I was an associate professor in Korea. I write textbooks. This job pays only \$50 a day and I'm required to be in charge of 50 to 80 students for 4 hours at a stretch. It's open enrollment with optional attendance. Every day I'm teaching to a different group of people. Still, I was grateful. The job would get me the official Swedish income I needed to seek an apartment, and without a place to live, I might as well go home. Starting in mid October. I left the house at 6:30 in the morning. Three days a week. Walked briskly for a kilometer to catch the 7:10 train in the Centrum of my neighborhood. Then arrived at the other end of Stockholm a few minutes before my 8:00 class. It was a long commute that gave me plenty of time to think, and most mornings I sat on the train amused. As I rattled on the old Subway, that took me North after the transfer at Central Station, half-asleep and sweating under my winter scarf because I had forgotten to loosen it like everyone else. I couldn't help, but smile. This was the funniest thing I could have imagined. I wasn't even Swedish three months ago. Now, it was my job to welcome, newcomers, who probably knew more about Swedish culture than I did all because my mother took me to Swedish church and spoke this language to me when I was a child in America. The smiles continued at work, but I kept them to myself so no one would discover my secret. I felt like the illiterate man who carries a copy of the Wall Street Journal in his back pocket to make people think he's an intellectual. First of all, I couldn't spell Swedish worth a damn. Most Swedish words are spelled the way they sound, luckily. But there are some doozies that aren't. One day I had my back turned to a room full of students copying their discussion questions on to the Whiteboard from a textbook when I stopped short. The word was gjorde. G J O R D E. I started saying it to myself and looked at the context. I realized it was word for it "did" which is pronounced pretty much like Yoda from Star Wars. My eyes shifted from the combination GJ to the R and back to the GJ again, which was supposed to be pronounced as Y. That's how you spell that?? Suddenly it felt like 40 people were breathing at my back, and I wondered how long I've been standing there immobilized. I re-clutched the book and swung around to use my all-knowing teacher voice. So just start with the first two and I'll write the rest of the questions in a minute. I just thought of something. I sat down at the desk and pretended to busy myself with urgent business at my computer. I took a breath, observed that the students were discussing the first two questions happily, then stood back up to write the question with "gjorde" in it. I was hoping for no more surprises that morning. On the way home in the subway, I remembered that this wasn't the first time I was trying to figure out a new country. It was the third. The time in Korea was simple in a way. Everything was so different there and I expected them to be different. But the first time hadn't been like that, it was like this time, and I was really, really young. I realized I was half the age then that Sinead was now. I was so young that I was still a newcomer to life itself. What did I know? What did I have anything to compare with? That's how I ended up becoming American, deep down in myself, even though I was from somewhere else. And it wasn't surprising that I couldn't spell "did" in Swedish. What did I ever do in Sweden to attach that word to? I couldn't say i "gjorde" that much before we left. Okay. So as you can see, a lot of things happen and some of them were sad, but I have one more which is a little shorter than that one. And this is an episode that has to do with the fact that I spoke Swedish with no accent and I still do. I don't have an accent but I hadn't been

using it, right? So, okay. And I was a child when I used in. There was a church. Okay, so here we go. During this difficult time, a few things also happened which were downright funny. And I should mention that I ended up taking care of two of the children. One was 12 and one was 16. So that was our little thing happening here. A little family of three. A few things happened that were downright funny. One of them involved shopping at the local mall, which was an activity. I didn't think I could mess up. The social workers had given me \$200 for each child to buy clothes, boots and winter clothes. At first, it went great. I took Finn and Sinead out separately, and we bonded while spending the money and discussing fashion choices. We stashed our shopping bags under the table at Burger King and bonded some more over burgers and fries. When both kids were done. I still had \$40 left. So, I popped my head into Sinead's room and asked if she needed anything else. Well, I'd like some hora byxor. She said, I wasn't quite sure what that was. Although. I recognize that byxor means pants. "So, a type of pants," I asked? "Yeah, I'll show you." She fiddled with the iPad and pulled up a picture of leggings with zigzag design on them. I had seen girls wearing them around town, and I thought they were cute. The style reminded me of the yoga pants the girls in Seattle walked around in. At first, I had thought yoga pants were too form-fitting to be attractive. But Jillian had shamed me out of that attitude when she was only 13. "Oh, come on, Mom. You can't be that old." So I had let her wear them, because I agreed I wasn't that old. Sinead's iPad pictures didn't have the Swedish name on them. So I knocked on Fin's door to make sure I knew how to ask for them. "Yeah, like she said they're hora byxor," he said. I had a vague sense that I should know what the first part of that word meant, or maybe should look it up. But I was busy, so I decided to repeat what the kids had said, go get a pair and check the task off my list. At the mall, I went into a shop that sold jeans and asked for hora byxor. The young cashier dressed, all in black and sporting black makeup, glanced up with a bored expression and said, "Never heard of them." So I figured they were more of a preteen thing. I looked in the store where Sinead had tried on jackets and t-shirts, but the salesman said they didn't have them either. I didn't see them hanging on any of the store windows as I walked around the mall either. Now I was on a mission. It was me against the hora byxor. I had to find them. Finally. I went into the baby and children's clothing store, which I hoped would have sizes big enough to fit Sinead. Walked up to the sweet smelling sales rep, pulled up the picture from my phone and said, "I've been looking everywhere for hora byxor. My 12 year old foster child really wants a pair. So I was hoping you'd have some." Of course, I said this in perfect Swedish without an accent so she had no doubt I knew what I was saying. The lady flushed deep pink. Her eyes darted from rack to rack, as if trying to escape from me. And then she rushed around toward the corner, where the store met the mall. With an uncoordinated wave toward a rack, she blurted, "Those are the only pants we have right there," and dashed back to the cash register, leaving me standing. But there right in front of me were hanging several pairs of hora byxor. Score one for me. They were too small for Sinead, but at least I had found some. With a victorious smile on my face, I decided to give up for the day and try to find bigger ones tomorrow. The ladies reaction had surprised me though. So, on the way home in the subway. I decided to try and spell hora the way it sounded into my online translation program and hope for the best. H-O-R-A I wrote in the translation box for Swedish, and the English box said: whore. I burst into the apartment and stomped into Fin's room without even knocking. "How could you let me do that. You knew what I was saying!" "What?" he said, barely glancing away from his computer game. "That's what everyone calls them." "Why?" "Because they're too tight. They make the girls look like damn whores." "Oh my God, you could have told me!" "You didn't ask." It was

weeks before I set foot in the mall again, and I never did return to the children's clothing store. I made a large semi circle around it every time I was up there on the second floor and glanced away in case the sales rep, might be looking out the window. Thank you for listening.

**00:41:44 Lynn Miller**

Thank you, Anna, very much. Enjoy your reading. And that's fantastic. Thank you for sharing that with me. And if you want with us and if you want to put your, you know, the title of it in the chat, so people can track down your, your books. That be also great. Yeah, let's see. Okay, Michael Hickey would be up next for a three-minute open mic reading. Is that right? And then we'll have our third reader of the evening, Katrina Canyon.

**00:42:22 Michael Hickey**

I have to say this is a very special group to me because in 2008... I knew Nelson Bentley. In 2008, Esther Helfgott nominated me for poet populist and I actually won and it kind of changed my life. So I don't know. I just I love her and I love this group. This poem is called this is the poem that I had written that was considered on the online and you there was like 13 poets and you had to pick your favorite. So this is the one I put up. It's called Don't Read This Poem. Don't read this poem unless your glass is half full, unless you're willing to believe that for every pissed-off tornado like the one in The Wizard of Oz, there is a sweet sister twister, like the Whirlwind in St. Mary's Kansas 1993. Ma asleep for hours. I hit the rack around midnight. Pa stumbles home drunk as usual bumbles to find his key, but there is no keyhole because there no house. The old white A frame is now perched 100 feet away with uncanny symmetry on top of the barn, as ma and I snoozed dreamily inside. Heirloom China neither chipped nor cracked, antique, crystal and mint condition. No farm, girl. Struck on the head. No animals killed or unaccounted for just a friendly. Pick me up from a lonely. Cyclone roaming through tornado alley on a Saturday night with God's fingerprints. Whirls all over it for my Miles down the road, the torrent spins a glorious Pit Stop through O'Malley's. Greenhouse plucks the sizable Garden of pink gardenias and Twirls its way through the state of Kansas a resplendent vacuum of positive energy tap-dancing pink. Tornado of love. Thank you.

**00:44:21 Lynn Miller**

Thank you very much. Michael Hickey. I appreciate you bringing your open mic reading. Is there anyone else who'd like to do a reading before we go to our third reader of the evening James Jones? Thank you so much for volunteering. And you have three minutes, sir. Thank you for joining us.

**00:44:43 James Jones**

Of course. Thank you so much. I appreciate it, and I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you. This is entitled Consecration. Ten. A relaxation of cheek muscles leads to a symmetrical dangling of the mandible. The lower lip slowly releases. Nine. A warm rush of breath circles around the auricle, causing a stirring of air to caress the tympanic membrane. Pupils dilate. Eight. The tongue catches the taste of vanilla, peppermint and paraffin upon her skin. Seven. The lower lip forms words, the upper lip refuses to contribute. Six. Eyelids flutter, masking surreptitious glances below the belt line. Five. His neck smells of leather, tobacco and cedar. Four. The nose grazes along her wet silken nape. Three. The exalting cries from surrounding strangers erupts like the ocean stealing sand. Two.

A purging release of air follows a sharp shocking inhale. Their eyes closed in faith and anticipation. One. They surrender in an impulsive communion, consecrating the asphalt beneath, capturing the sacred air between them. They surrender again. Happy New Year.

**00:46:26 Lynn Miller**

Thank you so much for joining us tonight, James, and for reading for us.

**00:46:30 James Jones**

Thank you.

**00:46:32 Lynn Miller**

Wonderful. We've just had a wonderful range of readers. I just want to give any last call for a 3-minute Open Mic reader and I don't see everybody. So any hands going up that I don't see, let me know. Okay? Well, I'm excited to introduce our last reader tonight. As you know these are recorded, and they will be put up on a YouTube channel. So you can share, share this with friends or, you know, distant people who couldn't be here tonight, and it'll also be a podcast as well. Again. Thank you everyone for joining us. Our last reader this evening is Katrina Canyon. Katrina Canyon is a 2020 and 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee. Her stories have been published in the New York Times and Huffington Post. From 2000 to 2003. She served as Poet Laureate of Sunland Tujunga. Which I had to ask how to pronounce during that time. She started a poetry festival and ran several poetry readings. She was featured in the Los Angeles Times and was awarded the Montesi award from St. Louis University in 2011, 2012 and 2013. She has published multiple chap books and an album. Her latest collection is Surviving Home. So welcome Katrina.

**00:48:08 Katrina Canyon**

Thank you very much. And I'm really happy to be here and Benjamin and Anna it has been an honor to hear your words as well as you Ginger and Michael and James, it's always wonderful to hear you. Michael and James are part of something I didn't put in my bio, the Canyon Poets, which is a poetry reading I started at the beginning of the covid pandemic. And it's been running every Thursday, since then, and we have featured readers every Thursday. So if you're interested, I usually post it on my website which I put in the chat already because I know when I'm done reading you guys going to be out of here like this place is on fire. So I will start my reading now. My pain is sculpted into art for you to consume. Here is my pain: gunshots echoing into the night, bullets whizzing past me as I flee across abandoned lots, heroin hidden behind the pink bow in my panties. Consume it. Here is my pain: Switch mark weapons, the smell of PCP, a black man dead in a Texas Creek. Consume it. This is my pain. My mother beaten black by my father. My father beaten blue by police over my voice. Consume it. This is my pain. My furniture pushed past the sidewalk while LA Marshalls watched and my friends stared. Consume it. This is my pain. Getting stopped by police for mumbling reasons, getting searched without cause, being followed in fear. Consume it. This is my pain, watching my mother die while watching white women live with the same thing. Seeing my tiny baby cry among fat white babies. Consume it, this is my pain, watching black babies die. Consume it. This is my pain, watching black boys die. Consume it. This is my pain, watching black men die. Consume it. Discuss it. Write it. Allow it to give you verbal diarrhea on CNN, MSNBC and Fox News. Give it a Black Lives

Matter hashtag and then do absolutely nothing. This one is called. Thank you. Small bear to Great Bear. "This is the Big Dipper," I say. "No." She splays my fingers into prawns and measures the night sky from Minor to Major. "There's the Big Dipper," she corrects. "They are all the same," I say. She replies, "No, they all have their place, their color like race. You cannot move from one to the other." I dismissed their distinctive twinkles and say, "they are the same." "They're not," she denies. "They're in different places like you and me." "But we're both here. I..." Her hands raised before my face and blocks the stars before my eyes. "No, we're not, you're here and I'm back there." Thank you. This one is called the new hope. Sitting atop the wall in my backyard. Sitting out the broadcast of Draft Notice on TV. Maybe the wall will hold my brother away from Vietnam. Sitting atop the cement block wall, kicking loose dirt from my Mary Jane's, ants scramble beneath showers of dust. Life and death separate between blades of grass. I am balancing atop a telephone wire between tossed sneakers and lost kites and crows caws. Atop my head sits the squirrel, and in my mouth, blindness replaces sight, where the sun freezes in my hand, and the moon burns my eyes and I kick away the crust in between my soles. This is where I will find a picket fence, painted white like dandelions. Thank you. Authority questions. Would it have been different if I were white, and if I had blue eyes, and I lived on a ranch with five hundred head of cattle? Would the doctor have still called me a liar, which he did. Would he have made the nurses hold me down while he pushed the speculum inside of me? Would he have said, "there are no black virgins living in the Midway" before he found my hymen, which he did? Before he called my mother, which he did before he was proven wrong, which he was? Would I have told my mother if my father hadn't already taught me how to be a good girl? How to be quiet? How to use the workarounds to hold onto virginity? Would I still have something to give? Innocence? Love? Trust? If it had not been taken from me already. Thank you. This one is called Trifling with Heroin. She learned to cut lines at eight. Look at her, she's so cute. She's imitating me. So proud to see the girl playing with salt. She slowly scraped a playing card along the dark wood, catching every grain. The transition to heroin was a given. The wife's little helper. Antipathy grew from [inaudible] heroin, to PCP, to crack. You often accused her of stealing, of being against you. Stillness was threatening enough. You played this game day to day. Joined by noone. Separated by futile talents. This is your daughter sitting at your knee. Now cut more into the other line. Make them straight. Thank you. This is called fan. On her knees with a button bread, she presses her auburn chin against the silver steel grate. She wills cool air from humidity which flies between brisk blades and resides upon her cheek. In her ears she catches the drum of the motor and her teeth hum like drunken bees. She shuts her eyes before the dry, and dreams of snow of wind of icy sheets of rain. Her hair stands straight and static shock as she smacks her nose against the blades. She stands and takes two steps back. And two steps back, until all she feels is heat and pain. A die cast on sand. I thought your hard edges were stone and immovable. Your freckles change, all mines, depending on the side you show, fortune or destruction. When I rolled you over and your character changed as you were nestled in dust, spread before Oceans of fire. Akin to a volcano ashen or acrimony. Your disregard fought with the wishbone. You gave me your heretic cornerstone speech, metamorphic rock ground into gravel and grit. After sunset you showed me revelations of rubble buried in my fragmented shell. I held you. You did not move, yet my heart did. When waves buried you beneath the water, I reached into the seaweed and plucked you out. Thanks. This one is called while dreaming of Harvey Weinstein. You peer at the top of my epidermal layers in search of an opening I will never give you. Nor will I supplicate myself to your playmate desires. With a wave of my hand I misdirect your stare toward the

honey chalice resting beneath your hardened estuary. Ice runs in sheets, providing millenary cracks until you catch a glimpse of the 24 karot gargoyles, settling atop your head. Yesterday, you ran free, devouring as ashes flew from your back. A single conscious being before the small Universe, over which you presided. Except the touch sharpened just as I drenched my eyes with salt vinegar and lye. And my mouth shrunk around you in disdain. You grab my delicate taste in the way that the grotesque captures the eye. Away from the listless Arctic while I can deal beyond you. Tell me why I should drop to my knees. When are the Blazing Mantle's of fish to appear as blasphemy? Into the editor's stomach bring your propositions, just as concocted brilliance erects to break away from your feet, beyond the bounds of the plaster. Give away the flowering abandonment. Throw away the paralysis of uncertainty like a stirrup, powerless against God's daughters. Thanks. This one is called quintessential pirate. I sail archetypal waters the moment. I find my tune. My fathers cross the Norwegian sea in trade ships as Vikings. My mothers cross the Gulf of Guinea in trade ships as slaves. Across the Atlantic, as the bogie croons, swam the creator of song. I cross this Mississippi and touch the Pacific. The songs of my mother. I sang in Norway a year ago. Blanched people, unrecognized tunes. When young, I sing Rapper's Delight on 111th and Prairie. The lights flash strangely farther across my dancing eyes, oiled vocal cords glowed dark along the sand. This is my time to sing, a claim from on high as the words skitter across the page. Thanks. This one is called censorship. My poems die at the root, at stem and bloom. I could carry them to Mass on tops of reeds, and sing funeral lullabies. My memory circle is melodies around the same place. A face that does not escape because it hides in my eyes. I bind it between my lips and I breathe it within my lungs. I am its mirror. It's reincarnation, the lines, the rhymes make another circle, back to the

### **01:00:10 Katrina Canyon**

cloak, back to the demon that encapsulates nightmares. It is my face, long dead. It resurrects itself in my belly again and again. It turns around. I wish I could call it ugly. But Beauty resides with those who hold it within their hands. My fingers were chopped off at birth, so I cannot touch the pedal or the thorn. My eyes were peck plucked free by roosters with long red combs and plumes, but they still call me beautiful as they mount the hills in my blind sided haunch. This affectation is for the lost words, the runaway letters, the gagged voice. This will be my last poem and thank you all for being here tonight. I wanted to say that. Epilogue. I feel my color burn in the belly of my TV. I digest the waiting confederate flags of unburdened arms. I am all set to combust and to shout and to chant rallying cry declaration. We from ancestral blood. In the turn of a swastika I taste yesterday on my tongue. They lynch the venerated rope around my neck. The president burns a cross my lawn with this derision. Through statues, highways, ships, memorials of the Confederacy. They deface the memory of a country who repeatedly attempts to expel me. Thank you so much,

### **01:01:57 Lynn Miller**

Katrina, the pleasure is ours. Thank you so much for your writing, Anna. Thank you for your stories Benjamin also for your writing. also Michael, James and Ginger. Thank you everyone for contributing to this beautiful, beautiful rich evening of words. It's been a great pleasure and honor to listen to you tonight.

