



# Library podcast

## 2016 Seattle Reads - Main Event with Karen Joy Fowler

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[0:00:40] Good evening, and welcome to our 18th Seattle Reads. I'm Marcellus Turner and I'm your city librarian and we are so happy to host this evening's event.

[0:00:53] This is a truly full house for Karen Joy Fowler we're all completely beside ourselves performed by Book-it Repertory Theatre. We're quite happy to have them here with us. It's an interesting evening for me because normally when we hold this event Chris Higashi is normally the person in charge of the event and she says, "You can't go to the podium until the door closes, you can't do this until I give you a signal," and so we're working with a couple of people tonight but Chris is here with us and she's sending signals to me, so I'll keep going. This is the 18th year of The Seattle Public Library's renowned Seattle Read series, hundreds of One Book community reading programs have taken place all over the country and internationally. The project originated here, the inspiration of Nancy Pearl and Chris Higashi, who did the first one in December 1998. I'm proud of our library for leading the way. We are grateful to all of our Seattle Reads sponsors, The Wallace Foundation which funded Seattle Reads

[0:01:56] at its inception, The Seattle Times for generous promotional support for library programs, the media sponsor KUOW Public Radio, Penguin Random House Library Marketing for arranging for Ms. Fowler to be with us this weekend, Elliott Bay Book Company, Rick Simonson and Karen Maeda Allman for being our longtime partner in Seattle Reads. Do visit The Elliott Bay table to see in buy Ms. Fowler's books. And finally special thanks to The Seattle Public Library Foundation and thousands of people in our community who make generous gifts to benefit our library. This private support makes possible Seattle Reads as well as hundreds of free library programs and services every year. So to Library Foundation donors who are here with us this evening, we say thank you very much for your support.

[0:02:54] We have a wonderful program this evening and I apologize I am going to have to do my own interpretation of Book-it and get to the airport immediately after this event, but you will be in good hands. Now let me turn things over to Chris Higashi, program manager of The Washington Center for the Book at The Seattle Public Library. She directs our annual series Seattle Read series and she will introduce the rest of the program.

[0:03:27] Welcome to this evening, with Karen Joy Fowler. I think you know that Seattle Reads aims are to deepen appreciation of, and engagement in, literature through reading and discussion, to create community around reading, around reading a shared book and for readers to voice differences of opinion from the shared foundation of reading that same book. So this year we're pleased to again feature another a work of literary fiction that's where we started with those with this program 18 years ago. It's been really fun to listen to readers reflect on the books themes, about family, personal identity, responsibility, history and memory, child-rearing, sibling rivalry, communication and relationships between species. So tonight in an annual tradition we are excited to present staged readings by Book-it Repertory Theatre. Twice now, these Seattle Reads readings have resulted in full stage adaptations of our Seattle Reads book, so Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* from 2011 and Dinaw Mengestu's, *The Beautiful*

[0:04:55] *Things that Heaven Bears* from 2008, many of you know because you have been here in the audience to see them that these staged readings have been powerful and moving and poignant and sometimes funny. I've been eagerly awaiting tonight's performance to see just what Book-it is going to do with Karen Joy Fowler's wonderful novel. Okay, so how many of you have seen a Book-it Repertory Theatre performance? Wow, fantastic, wow! Alright, so if you haven't then what you need to know is that Book-it is different from other theatres that you may have seen that the Book-It style uses almost every word that the author has written. The actors are going to speak both the narrative and the dialogue. Okay, with that here is *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler, thanks.

[0:06:06] *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler, published 2013 by GP Putnam's Sons a Penguin Random House Company. Those who know me now will be surprised to learn that I was a great talker as a child, there exists a home movie taken when I was two years old the old-fashioned kind with no sound. In the movie I'm collecting stones from the yard, working hard, eyes wide like a silent film star and I'm talking, nonstop. I collect a stone, drop it into a tub, repeat and the whole time the flow of words never stops. The point of the movie isn't the words themselves. What we valued was their extravagant abundance. The inexhaustible flow. Still there were times I had to be stopped. At bedtime I would speak without taking a breath, trying desperately to keep both my mom and dad in the room with only my voice, "Wait, I'd say, I have more to tell you." "If you have three things to say Rosemary dear, pick one and say that," "Start in the middle sweetheart," my father would say, tired, the way grown-ups are at the end of the

[0:07:11] day. "Skip the beginning, start in the middle." Okay then, here we go, skipping to the middle. I'm 20-something. It's winter in 1996. I meandering through my fifth year at the University of California, Davis. Your education, our father liked to point out, was wider than it was deep. Our father

a college professor himself and pedant to the bone. Solipsism is, the view or theory that the self is all that can be known to exist. Every exchange contained a lesson, like a pit in a cherry. At 22 years old my parents found me aggravating. My only ambition was to be widely admired or stealthily influential. I had the most hollow possible definition of interesting and was far from interesting myself. All of that was about to change. [Scene] I'm in the cafeteria with my grilled cheese sandwich and a glass of milk, waiting for someone or something interesting. "Space, your my fucking boyfriend, you want some fucking space?" Entered a girl named Harlow. "Harlow, please." Dishes crashed to the floor and shattered. She had long luxurious hair twisted

[0:08:33] into a braid and beautiful biceps. I remember wishing I had arms like hers. Ketchup and cola splashed in the breakage, "Harlow don't!" "Hows that, I'm just making more space for you." She pushed the table over. "Better?" "Hey, can everyone please leave the cafeteria so my boyfriend has more space?" "He needs a lot of fucking space." "This is exactly the shit I can't take, you psycho bitch, give me the key back to my place." She swung a chair [inaudible] crashed into my table. I grabbed my plate and glass of milk as my books fell to the floor. "You want your key, come get it." She picked up another chair. "Never mind, mail it!" A campus police officer arrived and moved cautiously toward me. Hand on her holster. Towards me, not the girl holding the chair. "All right, young lady calm down," "Not her," but the cop was clearly focused on me. "Calm down, you aren't in any trouble." "Never a police officer when you need one, right?" She smiled at me, it was a nice smile. Then she hoisted her chair and launched it toward the door. When the police

[0:09:33] officer turned to look, I dropped my plate. "I, I didn't mean to, it just went crashing to the floor." "I'm not playing around here, young lady, don't you test me." I raise my glass of milk as if proposing a toast and threw it on the floor. I threw that glass down as hard as I could so it's splashed everywhere. Forty minutes later, the psycho bitch and I were neatly tucked into the back of a police car, handcuffed. Being arrested had seriously improved my mood. Harlow Fielding, Drama Department. I'm Rosemary Cooke. We were booked and phone calls were made, the boyfriend from the cafeteria drove right over and Harlow was gone before they finished my paperwork. "Rosemary, what the hell did you do?" "I suppose someone put you up to it, you've always been a follower." The price of being booked was that I would have to come home for the whole of Thanksgiving break, so this matter can be properly discussed. We sat around the dining room table, set, as always on holidays and special days, before. Mom, Dad, me and the ghosts that

[0:10:44] no one ever mentions, until dad spilled his glass of wine for the third time. Mom disappeared to her bedroom and I did the dishes and sat in the kitchen pretending to study for my upcoming finals by myself. A very heavy price for spilling my milk. When I returned to campus after the holiday, I opened my door, "Ah, you scared me. There was Harlow reclining on the couch, wrapped up in Rosemary's shawl and drinking one of my diet sodas. I stared, gaping. "Oh God, I hope you don't mind?" "How did you know where I lived?" "Your police report." "How did you get in?" "I gave your apartment manager a pretty face and a sad story, I'm afraid he can't really be trusted." She was wearing my slippers. "You got a postcard it's a picture of Angkor Wats in Cambodia. "What does it say?" "Read your mail, that is beneath me."

[0:11:47] "You get big," my heart skipped. It was from Lowell. My brother, Lowell. The postmark said London, which meant it was from anywhere but there. "And some guy came looking for you, Travers he said he was your brother, but I didn't let him in, that wouldn't be right." "Did he say he'd come back?" "Maybe in a couple of days, maybe he looks scary like a drug dealer." "My brother's name is not Travers." That was the most persuasive detail. I had several reasons for choosing UC Davis; one, far from home; two, Mom and Dad said okay; but third, and really, it was because of Lowell. My parents must have known this otherwise, they wouldn't have paid that first year of out-of-state tuition when there was a perfectly good institution just down the road. The FBI said that "Lowell had been in Davis, in Spring of 87." A year after he took off, Davis. In my fantasies my brother would rattle his knuckles on her dorm room door. I'd open it, not expecting a thing, and I would recognize him, instantly. The last time I saw him, I was 11 and he hated my guts. "Damn it, Rosemary, you should have kept your

[0:13:04] goddamn mouth shut!"

[0:13:08] Religion and violence. It's the last class before finals. And everyone showed up, even the stoners. I'm sitting in the front row. The instructor Dr. Sosa, is a popular teacher who sports Star Trek ties and mismatched socks. We'll begin with a discussion of violent women. Yeah! Shh! Dr. Sosa's lectures were enthusiastic and wide ranging. You'd ever asks me about 99% of the college lectures I attended, I couldn't tell you a thing. This particular afternoon, in this particular class, falls into the other one percent. His lecture was an odd assortment of girl on girl violence. Ranging from Ireland to Pakistan to Peru. Dr. Sosa's thought of these less as independent movements and more is adjuncts to whatever the men were doing. Dr. Sosa's heart was just not into the violent women and suddenly with no warning at all he was talking about chimpanzees. Chimpanzees share our human propensity for insider-outsider violence. He described what border patrolling males do in their murderous raiding parties. He rhetorically asks if doctrinal differences simply provided cover for our primate and

[0:14:25] viciously tribal selves. He keeps making eye contact with me. Smile it will improve your grade.

[0:14:32] Among chimpanzees the lowest status male was higher than the highest status female. He was looking at Rosemary the whole time he said this. I tried to smile but I, my mind was stuck on what he was saying. Most religions are obsessed with policing female sexual behavior. It is their entire reason for being, managing female sexual behavior. The only difference is that no chimpanzee ever claimed he was following God's orders. Sexual hurting, like rape or domestic abuse is a chimp behavior. Take the following observation from one of Dr. Jane Goodall's team, a female in estrus is forced to have sex with various males 170 times over a three-day period. "Rosemary, are you alright? Your hands." They were shaking so hard my pen was vibrating on the paper. "Rosemary?" "What's up with your friend?" "I'm fine, I'm fine. I'm no stranger to bad sex, but I've never been forced into any sex that I hadn't wanted at the time." Preference for our own kind, our own kind within the species begins at birth. In other words our most

[0:15:38] developed morality 'do unto others' is an unnatural, inhuman behavior. And this then is the human tragedy, that the humanity we share is fundamentally based on the denial of a common shared humanity. [Clapping] Thank you. Good luck with your finals. Dr. Sosa looked my way, I could have given him a reassuring nod, but I was upset. Extremely, profoundly, heart racingly upset. What followed that evening, "Wooh!" and well into the night. On Harlow's encouragement a night of unparalleled tomfoolery and mishap. "All right ladies!" That once again landed me in the Yolo County Jail. There was drinking and puking and pill-popping. Stupid, I know. At one point I was cradling a toilet at the G Street Pub with Dr. Sosa's lecture in my head, "A female in estrus is forced to have sex with various males 170 times over a three-day period. "No!"

[0:16:50] I need to stop. I'm at the end of the middle, the points in my story where my brother's arrival is imminent, and I can't keep going without going back, to the beginning, my very beginning which happens to be the part of the story I've never told anyone before. Once upon a time, there was a family with two daughters, Rosemary and Fern, a son named Lowell, a mother and a father who promised to love their children exactly the same. In most families, there is a favorite child, parents deny it, but it's obvious to the children. I was our mother's favorite child. I, my father's. I loved my father as much as our mother, but Rosemary loved Lowell best of all, Fern loved our mother best, Lowell loved Fern more than he loved Rosemary, something for everyone. I was five when Fern disappeared from my life, right after she killed the kitten. "That's not true, Rosemary." "Lowell," there was no kitten, she made it up." "I didn't, 'prove it' killed it, it's all your fault Rosemary, liar." Lowell. Before Fern left, Lowell was part of the family, after he was just killing time

[0:18:04] until he could be shed of them. He'd run off, it wasn't it my fault. Spend days away from home. Nobody knew where, did we push him away? You all blame me, my own goddamn wife, my own goddamn children. My father drinking, "Stop it, Vince, Vince I just don't know." My mom's voice too soft to be heard through my bedroom wall and Lowell returning all stealth and rage climbing the stairs in the dark without anyone hearing him, waking me. "Rosemary, if only you would had kept your goddamn mouth shut!" So I shut my mouth. The remainder of my childhood took place in an awed silence. Spent a lot of time alone or with my imaginary friend Mary, my other half, get it. Rose, Mary, my other, other half if you include Fern. Lowell carried the weight of Fern's disappearance, and I carried the weight of our mothers collapse. Anyone would think Fern had died, which is maybe what you two are thinking, Fern was not dead, she still isn't. Tell them about your imaginary friend, "Mary?" What else? "She was not a little girl, 'and' 'she was a chimpanzee."

[0:19:25] So was Fern, many of you will have figured that out. Others of you may feel it was irritatingly coy of me to have withheld Fern's essential simian-ness until this point in the story. I had my reasons, you left me. I spent all my school years defined by this one fact, "Monkey girl, monkey girl, you smell." Kids

[0:19:47] can be cruel. If I tell you Fern is a chimp, you don't think of her as my sister instead, you think of her as some kind of pet. Fern was not the family dog. She was my sister, my shadow, my sidekick, our parents promised to love their children exactly the same. We were not the only household in 1974 attempting to raise a baby chimpanzee as if she were a human child. The

supermarket aisles were full of paired families. We were the first of our kind since the Kellogg families pairing in the 1930's. We studied every phase of their co-development, every phase. By the 1970's, in most chimped-up households, the human child was considerably older and no part of the experiment. But not in ours, Fern was your sidekick, my playpal, Fern was bonafide scientific research, she was your fun-house mirror. I had access to an army of grad students. Like Matt from Birmingham, England scientifically notating your development. He was my favorite. I was at the top of the game. Fern was your whirlwind, my other half. She was same not

[0:20:50] same. Observe, same not same. Fern's version of same not same involves being shown two things. Two apples for instance or one apple and one tennis ball. She holds two poker chips, one red, one blue, if she thinks the two things are the same she supposed to give the grad student the red chip, blue means not same. My games are more advanced, Fern gets frustrated because she is not allowed to eat the apples. So she pulls my hair and laughs. "Now listen, carefully," he tells his grad students, "when Fern laughs the sound is constrained in time to her breath, so the laughter comes in pants what would this mean for oral speech development?" No one seems to care that Fern was being mean to me by pulling my hair. This is important data. Lucky for me, I always knew what Fern was thinking. no matter how bizarre. Fern wants to go outside. Fern was to watch Sesame Street. Fern thinks you're a doodoo head, it was very convenient for both of us. "Why does Fern have to learn our language, why can't we learn hers?" Language versus communication.

[0:22:02] Language is more than just words. He was ever the University Professor. Language is also the order of words and the way one word reflects another. It had something to do with umwelt. I didn't care what umwelt meant, but it was fun to say. Umwelt, umwelt, umwelt. Umwelt refers to the specific way each particular organism experiences the world. The thing ostensibly being studied is rarely the thing being studied. So, what was the goal of the Fern-Rosemary, Rosemary-Fern study, before it came to it's premature and calamitous end. Surrounded as she was by humans, Fern believed she was human. Most home raised chimps when asked to sort photographs into piles of chimps and humans make only one mistake, putting their own picture into the human pile. I like to think of Fern as bringing sign language to the other apes, I'd like to think we've given her superpowers. For me, Fern was the very beginning. I was just over a month old when she arrived in my life. She used to wrap her pipe cleaner arms around my waist from behind

[0:23:10] and press her face and body into my back, match me step for step when we walked as if he were a single person. Made the grad students laugh, a monkey on my back. When she left, no one cared anymore about my creative grammars, my compound lexemes, my nimble gymnastic conjugations. The graduate students disappeared from my, from my life the same moment Fern did. One day every word I said was data, carefully recorded for further study and discussion, the next I was just a little girl strange in her way, but of no scientific interest to anyone. After Fern was taken away I began to pay better attention to the stories my mother read to me about how parents love their daughters, for Fern's sake. You know the old fairy tale about how one sister's words turned to flowers and jewels and the other to snakes and toads, this is how that fairytale ends. The older sister is driven into the forest where she dies, miserable and alone, her own mother turned against her. "Mommy, please don't read that story, ever again." One

[0:24:32] morning, months after Ferns departure just like that. Mom came back into focus, she showered, she cooked, we returned to reading and eventually talking around the dinner table. Weeks passed without dad taking a drink. Now, we could go on trips, we spent Christmas in Waikiki. I remember how beautiful our mother was. Brown from the sun, flowers dripping from her neck, "*And all the ama-ama come a swimming to me.*" "Oh, children isn't your mother a lovely woman?" He lifted his glass. "Oh, Vince stop." Very intelligent

[0:25:07] woman my dear. Wouldn't it be good for you to have a job so you wouldn't be stuck in the house all the time, especially since someone will be off to kindergarten soon. I hadn't know that I was going to kindergarten, I hadn't been around other kids. I was stupid enough to be excited. Mom agreed in that general way that meant not to pursue the topic, that she would consider going back to work. The calm lasted, many months. And then one night at supper Lowell said suddenly, "Fern really loved corn on the cob, remember what a mess she'd make, remember how Fern loved us?" "Don't!" "I want to go see her, we all should, she's wondering why we haven't come?" "We all miss her but we have to think what's best for her, she's settled in now and happy, 'Dad that..!' seeing us would stir her up I know you don't mean to be selfish but, you'd be making her feel worse for the sake of you feeling better." This wasn't the first time Dad made that argument.

[0:26:05] "Oh Vince, Vince what we've done," mom was weeping. Now look what you've done, Lowell left the house and was gone for a week. We never found out where he went. Fern has a different family now, on a farm. There are other chimpanzees there so she has friends. I was instantly jealous. I wondered if she liked any of her new friends better than me. You know, Fern doesn't like to be made to try new foods. New could be good, but you can still eat her favorites, Pigeon peas, Cake apples, Jamjams. She can, but she can still eat her favorites, "yes Rosemary," "Jelly rolls, Monkey bars, Summer salt. "Yes, dear." "But she can still eat her favorites. "Yes, Rosemary, Fern can still eat her favorites. I believed in that farm for many years, so did Lowell. Meanwhile, Lowell clawed his way to high school. High school Lowell was easier to live with than middle school Lowell. Stop demanding to go see Fern and join the family in seldom mentioning her. He have a on again off again relationship with a girl named Katherine Chalmers, but everyone calls her Kitch. In his senior year Lowell was point guard and

[0:27:11] captain on the South High School basketball team. I went to all the games. Everyone was nice to me when my brother was on the court directing traffic. One day when Lowell was absolutely supposed to be at practice. I heard him come into the house. When I opened the door to his bedroom he was weeping his face was red and wet and puffy as a cloud. "Get the fuck out of my room, don't ever come to my room, ever." By dinner he seemed normal. That night I took all my money, I took my dad's keys and I walked to the lab and I let myself in. I consolidated all the rats into a few cages and let them go outside. Then I caught a bus to Chicago. And never came back. Mom took Lowell's disappearance hard, worse than when we lost Fern. She never even managed to pretend to recover. We hired a private investigator to track him down, there were sightings, reports, but he disappeared completely. One day I found a note that he left for me tucked inside, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. "Fern is not on a fucking Farm." It never once

[0:28:17] occurred to me, our father had been lying all along. Months became years. I still thought Lowell would come back someday. I stopped talking. I became virtually silent. No funding, no resources, no grad students. He started drinking. Occasionally, we heard from Lowell. Lowell. A postcard would come, a handwritten message sometimes, sometimes not, always unsigned. "I hope you're happy." We stopped looking for him one day in 1987, June. When the FBI showed up, "Mrs. Cooke, 'yes,' "FBI. Lowell Cooke is a person of interest in a fire that caused 4.6. million dollars of damage to the Thurman Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at UC Davis. Lowell. "Who is Fern?"

[0:29:14]

Two years later I was biking my way through the beautiful autumnal, Indiana University campus. "Rosemary! Wait up." It was Kitch Chalmers. My brother's high school girlfriend, now in college genuinely glad to bump into me. "Rosemary Cooke, my old buddy from way back." "Who knew. "Let me buy you a Coke." We chatted a bit. "I'm in a Sorority." She chatted. "Getting my education degree. I listened. "Of course, you would be a great teacher." Which was strangely prophetic because teaching is eventually what I did. "What have you heard from Lowell?" And then she told me something I didn't know. "Last time I saw Lowell, before he ran away, we have been walking together, toward basketball practice and we ran into Matt, some grad student who knew you. Matt from Birmingham, England. I loved him and Matt said he left Bloomington with Fern and was surprised that Lowell didn't know that. He had volunteered to help with Ferns transition to her new home, a psych lab in Vermillion, South Dakota with more than 20 chimps, run by a doctor about whom Matt had nothing good to say.

[0:30:23] They treated Fern like some kind of animal. Dr. Uljevick insisted on limiting my time with Fern up to a couple of hours per week. He put her in a cage with four, larger, older chimps. She was terrified. When I told him she'd never been with chimps before and couldn't they introduced her slowly? Dr. Uljevick said, "If she can't learn her place, we can't keep her here." He never once called Fern by her name.

[0:30:55] And then Lowell was just lost it. I tried to make him go to basketball practice. I was afraid he'd be benched for the final game with Marion. I told him it was his responsibility. I'm sure that went over well. He said the strangest thing and I was so afraid when he said it. "Don't talk to me about responsibility, that's my sister in a cage." "His sister. We had a big fight and I broke up with him. Oh, Rosemary. I was awful. I told him I didn't want to be the girlfriend of the guy who lost the game to Marion." But I barely heard, I was still hearing, "Out there in South Dakota they treated Fern like some kind of animal." When Lowell heard that Fern was in a cage in South Dakota, he had taken off that very night and eventually headed a cell of an anti-violent, anti-vivisectionist group called ALF, Animal Liberation Front. When I heard that Fern was in a cage, my response was to pretend I hadn't heard it. As I biked home, it took me all of five blocks to decide, it wasn't such a bad story after all. Good old, Matt. 20 chimp



[0:31:58] friends. The cage just an interim measure before she moved on to the farm my dad had told us about. Lowell was capable of leading to some pretty crazy conclusions. And then I tried my best to never think of Fern again. By the time I left for college, I'd come surprisingly close to achieving this.

[0:32:19] "Sophomore year!" I entered an apartment share, advertised by craft beer anime freak named Kimmy. Who had a gift for procuring Japanese anime videos like *The Man in the Iron Mask*. One twin was the King of France. The other twin is thrown into the Bastille and forced to wear an iron mask so no one will ever see his face. The twin in prison has all the kingly qualities. The King on the throne is an asshole. Toward the middle of this cartoon there's freakish ballet under a crazy fireworks sky. Uh, total Narnia rip off but, great. Suddenly, I, couldn't breathe. "Rosie, you alright?" Kimmy shoved the popcorn bag into my face. "Breathe into the bag. Breathe. You all right?" "Yes." "Should we call someone?" "No." "What happened?" I honestly didn't know. I didn't want to know. Nor did I want to see the rest of the movie. "You should lie down." "I'll be fine." And I was. I went to my room and turned my face to the wall and wept. When there's an invisible elephant in the room one is from time to time bound to trip over. Years passed, back to the beginning. "You want some fucking space," Harlow blows

[0:33:41] through the door like a hurricane. If hurricanes are tall, sexy girls, with exceptional hair and great arms. So maybe I'm not so alarmed and put upon as I first appeared. Maybe I can see that Harlow wasn't as angry as she was pretending to be. Smashing dishes, throwing furniture, it's all performative. I was enjoying myself. As a fellow imposter, I appreciated her vigor. Fast forward now to me returning to Davis after Thanksgiving vacation and finding Harlow in my apartment. "You didn't like that?" Finding someone with no boundaries in my things, wearing my slippers, been there, done that. Harlow could have pissed in the corner and it would have been nothing I hadn't seen before. By my family metric her behavior hardly even counted as a scene. I was struck by the time it took me to recognize that familiarity. It was one thing to conceal my monkey girlness, it was quite another thing to completely forget it. Turns out after all that effort to conceal myself from others I didn't like it one bit. I knew Harlow was bad news.

[0:34:50] Yet, it's hard to overstate how lonely I was. When I lost Fern, I lost Lowell. I lost my mother and father. I lost all the grad students, including my beloved Matt, who when the moment came chose Fern over me? Harlow was obviously untrustworthy, but at least I could be my true self and that seemed interesting, tempting even. So what have I got? One, I'm a bright-eyed undergraduate with her very own arrest record. Two, I have a muffled message from my brother Lowell from out of the blue. And three, I've got Harlow. Mostly, I focused on item number two my brothers return and waited, and waited. So here we are back in the middle. "Whoa." The evening after Dr. Sosa's lecture was a nightmare. Under the influence of Harlow's little white pills, pizza, walking through the empty Shell station car wash, back to the G Street Pub, boys hitting on Harlow, boys not hitting on me. And then suddenly I'm looking up at a skinny guy with hair so bleached it's almost white. I fall into his arms and without thinking call him by his

[0:36:10] real name. "Lowell?" "Rosemary? You're all grown up." I burst into tears. "I didn't recognize you until you tried dancing on the pool table." And then just my dumb luck. "All right, ladies." "Officer

Annie from the Yolo County Sheriff is lecturing me.” “About these decisions you're making Rosemary. A drunk woman is a woman asking for trouble. You're coming with me. You can sleep it off at county.” The last thing I hear is Officer Annie is leading me away is. “Don't worry, I'll keep Travers company while you're in the slammer.” “Who's Travers?”

[0:36:51] “Travers, oh my God you are out of your mind high. Travers, your brother.” “Alright. Alright. Listen here Rosemary, I don't like this company you're keeping we will talk about this when you are sober.” I look around for my brother, but he is so skillful at disappearing. I figured I'd imagined him. But let's sideline that thought for a moment and allow me to digress for your educational fulfillment and to build tension toward the climax of our story, a lesson. The flip side to solipsism it's called theory of mind. Theory of mind postulates that we readily impute mental states to others causing us to constantly infer someone else's intentions. Humans do this, but children younger than four have a difficult time sequencing a jumbled set of images. Children can describe the pictures but fail to see a character's intentions or goals, they miss the links that order the images. They have the innate potential for theory of mind, but it is undeveloped. Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind? Definitely. Yes, chimps, even understand, understand deceit around the

[0:37:56] age of six or seven human children develop a theory of mind that encompasses embedded mental states. For example, mommy thinks I've gone to bed, the next layer, daddy doesn't know that mommy thinks I've gone to bed. Typical adult humans can work with four layers of embedded imputation. Gifted adults can go in as deep as seven layers that appears to be the human limits. Thank you.

[0:38:27] Next morning I was released from my cell. Hopelessly hungover and zinging from my pill popping overnight in the big house and fell into my bed, consciously avoiding the notion of what may have occurred in it between Harlow and my brother for a very long sleep. And then just like the old days, he shook her awake without a word. He put his arms around me and said, “Rosemary, how about a piece of pie?” The streets were deserted. The rain had stopped our footsteps echoed off the silent sidewalks. “How's Mom?” This is what I'd hoped for whenever I imagined seeing Lowell again. This exact moment when I could stop being an only child. “She's fine.” “How dad's drinking?” “In his own words, you learn as much from failure as from success, though no one admires you for it.” We walked into Bakers Square with their gingham curtains and laminated placemats and muzack. We were the only customers. My brother's face across the table was more and more like our dads. I thought he looked exhausted but not in the way people look exhausted when they've

[0:39:54] been up all night having great sex. Just in the way people look when they're exhausted. “College girl, so far from home. Do you love it? Is life good?” “I can't complain.” “Come on, don't be modest, I'm sure you can complain for days.” We stayed at Bakers Square the rest of the night, frustrating the waitstaff greatly and talking. “Dad said we were all animals, but when he dealt with Fern he didn't start from a place of congruence, his methods put the burden of proof on to her. It was always her failure for not being able to talk to us never ours for not being able to understand her. It would have been more scientifically rigorous to start with an assumption of similarity more Darwin.” “And a lot less rude.” “You remember that game Fern used to play with the red and blue poker chips.

Same-not same, of course, Fern was always giving you the red chip, no one else just you, remember that. The red chip. Same. I remembered it, when he said it. The time when Fern pulled your hair and nobody paid attention and you broke

[0:41:09] your elbow while dad in the grad students were discussing Fern's surprising laugh. I didn't think anyone had noticed Fern was still holding the poker chips, the red for same the blue for not same, with every appearance of careful consideration, she gave you the red chip. Fern looked at me from those bright shadowed eyes and placed the red chip onto my chest. I thought it meant that Fern was apologizing. When you feel bad, I feel bad is what I got from that red chip. We're the same you and I. My sister Fern. In the whole wide world, my only red poker chip. "Lowell, tell me everything. When you left. Start at the beginning." "You don't want to hear all that." But I do. "I'll start in the middle. South Dakota was cold. Finding Uljevick's lab was easy. I arrived at a compound with a chain link fence threaded with electric wire. No one was around, I hid behind some posts. As car drove up the compound gate opened and a man started unloading large bags of Purina Dog Chow from the back of the station wagon into a shed.

[0:42:25] I walked right in, simple as that. I found myself in a dark hallway with a set of stairs. I could hear chimps in the basement and a smell strong of a strong smell of ammonia and shit. There were four cages all in a row and at least a dozen dark squat figures inside them." He paused, "You sure you want me to go on?" He wasn't really offering to stop. "I recognized Fern right away because, because she was the youngest and smallest. She was in a cage with four large adults." A female in estrus. "Her hair was redder than the others, her eye, her ears were set a little higher like, like teddy bear ears. She'd changed, more solid and squat. It was eerie the way she recognized me. It was as if she felt me coming. I saw her go rigid her hair started to rise and she began to very quietly make those, ooh, ooh, ooh sounds she made when she got agitated and she spun around and lept for the bars of the cage. She was she was shaking them and swinging back and forth looking right at me and screaming, I ran toward them. When I got close she

[0:43:33] she grabbed my arm and pulled me so hard that she slammed me into the bars. Fern had my hand inside the cage inside her mouth, but she hadn't bitten me yet. She couldn't decide if she was more happy to see me or more angry. I tried to pull my hand back. I was frightened of her. But she wouldn't let go.

[0:43:56] I, I, I tried. I started talking to her, signing with my free hand, telling her I loved her. She was squeezing my hand so hard there were flashes going off like, like, like pop guns in my eyeballs. It was all I could do to keep my voice calm and quiet. Another chimp, a big male and fully erect came and tried to take my hand from her and she wouldn't let go. So, so, so he grabbed my other arm and they be pulling on me. They bounced me against the bars. I broke my nose. I hit my forehead. I needed stitches on the side of my face. Fern turned and bit the male chip on his shoulder more screaming like a mosh pit. A very dangerous mosh pit. The big chimp dropped my arm and backed away with his mouth wide open showing his canines. I swear they look like shark teeth. He was standing straight, his hair, like hers, all up. He was he was trying to threaten her, but she wasn't paying attention to him. She was signing with her free hand to me, my name.

[0:44:55] 'L'. With a slap against her chest and then, 'Good. Good Fern. Fern is a good girl. Please take me home now. I'll be good. I promise, I'll be good.' The big chimp came crashing in from behind her and Fern couldn't defend herself and all the other chimps were screaming and still she didn't let go. By now two men had arrived shouting at me maybe, Uljevick, himself. One of them was carrying a cattle prod. How is this, I remember thinking going to work. How can they shock Fern and not get me? How can I stop them from shocking Fern. The male chimp saw the prod and backed right off everyone got quiet. They showed it to Fern and she finally let go. I was told get the fuck out before the police were called. Fern was trying to press herself to the bars still signing my name and also hers. 'Good Fern, good Fern.' The men began arguing over whether to dart her or not, when they saw the blood from where the big male that attacked her. The argument was over and one of them called the vet. The other pushed me towards the stairs. 'You think you're

[0:46:09] funny. He said think you're funny boy, tormenting animals like that, get the fuck out of here and don't ever come back.' He stood over Fern with the cattle prod, he was protecting her from the other chimps but, I know she saw it as a threat. Her signing got sloppy, despairing. How even after everything she protected me from the alpha male. The price she paid for that. The way her face looked when I left her. I never saw her again." So here we are, deep in the middle, of the middle of the story.

[0:47:23] Okay, so we are inviting the adapter, and the director of the performance that we've just seen, and the author Karen Joy Fowler to this stage.

[0:47:44] Okay, so let's see. Let's see first let me ask the actors to introduce themselves. Hi, I'm [unintelligible]

[0:48:06] Hi, I'm Benjamin McFadden. Hannah Moots.

[0:48:18] My name is Brian Birch, I adapted Ms. Fowler's book for this reading. It was amazing. I'm Jocelyn Maher.

[0:48:32] Annie Dimartino.

[0:48:37] Hi, I'm Jim Gall.

[0:48:43] Okay, I also want to just take a minute to acknowledge our other good friends at Book-It Repertory Theatre. Let's see, Jane Jones are you here? Jane?

[0:49:01] Let's see, I don't think we have Myra Platy or Patricia Britain or Josh, Josh, are you here? Oh Josh. Okay.

[0:49:12] Let's see development director, where are you ok, Sally?

[0:49:21] If I'm missing somebody else, I apologize but we, we love you Book-it Repertory Theatre. Thank you as always.

[0:49:33] Okay. Now it really is my great pleasure to welcome Karen Joy Fowler to this main event of 2016 Seattle Reads, you know, I personally I have been at every single author event for Seattle Reads for 17 years. And so this year it's not been possible which makes me so sad. But here I have to stop and say my very very deep deep gratitude to my colleagues Andrea Goff and Linda Johns. Come forward you guys, both of you.

[0:50:21] I mean, really, thank you for what ably, efficiently, beautifully, managing, Karen Joy Fowler's Seattle visit. I just can't thank you enough. Me as well. Thank you so much. You know, I know it's been a wonderful two days so far. Actually got to go to one of the events last night meeting rooms full of readers who read the book closely and thought about all the issues that it raises and ask good questions and everybody delighting in Karen's thoughtful, insightful, often humorous, answers. We have two more events tomorrow so tell your friends. We're at West Seattle Branch tomorrow at noon and at Queen Anne Branch at four o'clock. So really so happy to welcome you to Seattle, Karen. Karen, Thank you, Chris. Yeah, the best-selling author of what six novels, short stories collections. This novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize the first year the prize was open to Americans. That is a tremendous, tremendous honor. Congratulations.

[0:51:43]

Numerous other awards, the California Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner. Besides this novel, she's of course well, well known for *The Jane Austen Book Club* and then there's an old favorite of mine *Sarah Canary* which is set in Washington territory, I highly recommend it. Okay, I think well, let's see what to say. A few years ago, Linda and Andrea got to host an event here at the library with Karen Joy Fowler and her good friend the novelist Ruth Ozeki was in partnership with Hedgebrook the wonderful writers retreat for women on Whidbey. They were that event featured some Book-it style readings from there two novels which were new at the time and here I should stop and mention that Book-It has announced its 2016-2017 season. It's going to open in September with Ruth Ozeki's, *A Tale for the Time Being*.

[0:52:41] Karen made a note of the dates and so we are going to hope to see both Karen and Ruth in Seattle this fall. All right format for tonight the rest of the evening, end of the evening you're going to be invited to to meet Karen and to have your book signed, she'll be at a table in the lobby. Thanks again to Elliott Bay. And if you haven't already, please do give us your email address. So you can participate in the survey, your comments help us to learn about the effectiveness of the aims of Seattle Reads and they help us to plan future library programs. Okay. So here's the first question. How many of you have read *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*? And how many of you have read to the end? Okay, that tells us a little bit about what we're going to say. Okay, so now please help me welcome the wonderful writer Karen Joy Fowler to The Seattle Public Library and invite your questions. Thank you.

[0:53:44] I need to ask you all up on stage to quickly paraphrase or repeat the question in a way, you know answer the question in a way that conveys it so we get it on tape. Okay. All right who has a question? So to paraphrase, this is actually my niece asking me

[0:54:05] If I actually know all of the words that Rosemary knows in the book and as you probably suspected the answer is no that... One of the bits of advice that you get as a as a early writer is that you should never use a hundred dollar word when a two dollar word will do and so it was it was great fun to write about a character who was always going to use the hundred dollar word and I got the words for Rosemary's preposterous vocabulary up in the attic in a book that my daughter used to prep for the GRE's. So I took the vocabulary list you are apparently supposed to know if you go to graduate school and I picked out all the words on it I did not know. You know at the moment I put them in the book, I had looked them up. I was pretty sure I was using them properly, for a brief shining period those words were part of my vocabulary, but that period ended about two years ago. Have I been charged with being an anti-science? I, I,

[0:55:29] I have, but not often and I have had responses from scientists, from primatologists, who liked the book better than that, but I think you know the my own feelings about the science and the scientists in the book. First of all, is that a lot of the experiments that I was particularly focusing on appear very unscientific to me. I don't even, they're very laborious, concocted and they don't seem to me to actually lead to results that provide us with much of interest and there's a great deal of torment involved in conducting these experiments but as part of doing research for the book I took eventually a class at, I sat in on a class at UC Santa Cruz, which was about animal theory. I took an animal theory class and learned kind of where the scientific research at this moment regarding animal cognition and animal capabilities is, it was just an incredible class, fascinating, fascinating class. Had some wonderful stories about crows that take place right up here on the campus of of UDub. And so,

[0:57:10] you know on the one hand, I feel very uncomfortable with animal subjects and particularly in the psychological experiments and on the other hand I was very aware that if we have, as I think we do, a new appreciation for the complex lives and capabilities of the other animals that we share the planet with, that's down to the scientists who have who have developed better methods of looking at at those issues. And, and, and I think are hopefully in the process of opening our eyes to to what is around us.

How did I come up with the idea for the book? The idea for the book actually was my daughter's, she gave it to me we had, I grew up in Bloomington, Indiana and my father was an animal behaviorist who worked with rats. He ran rats through mazes and he studied learning processes and he died before my daughter was born so he's kind of a mythical figure to her and around the millennial new year, we ended up in Indiana the two, my daughter and I, and I was showing her where I had grown up and recounting

[0:58:44] stories from my childhood and we walked around the campus and I showed her where the rat lab used to be and where my dad's office used to be and in the process of talking about this, I eventually got to the Kellogg experiment which is the basis of my book that the real-life experiment

that my book is very very fictionalized account of and and I, you know, because I grew up around psychologists and around animal behaviorist and this experiment was, seemed to me like something everybody already knew, you know that I'd heard about it my whole life and so I was very surprised that my daughter, who has a PHD in Marine Biology, had never come across this experiment before and she, she was quite shocked by it, by my account of it and she said what would it be like to be the child in that experiment? That should be your next book mom, so, I always say I do not have good ideas myself, but I know them when I hear them.

[0:59:57] And I will just finish that little anecdote by telling you that my daughter has a book of her own coming out in April of this next year. And as a result of deciding that she too is a writer has informed me that that pipeline of great ideas from her to me, that's not functional anymore.

[1:00:24] Particularly as this book has done so well, there have been many, many occasions on which she is said to me, I wonder if it was really smart to have given you that idea?

[1:00:38] I'm being asked about the decision to put what I obviously so carefully intended to surprise you with in the book, on the back cover of the book, so that there is no possible way for you to be surprised. You know, it was truly something I did not think about at all as I was writing the book. It seemed to me that in order to tell the story the way I wanted to tell it one of the very first things I knew was that I was going to need to conceal Ferns identity for a period of time. And so, you know that that idea was in place as I started the book. I never thought of doing it any other way, but I never did actually stop to think what a problem I was creating for my publisher and and for reviewers and you know anybody who wish to talk about the book. My marketing department who's basically said to me, "So as we understand it, you would like us to sell this book to people but we're not allowed to tell anyone what it's about. Is that is that kind of where we are?" And I have to say that although

[1:01:57] I hadn't thought about it I was mildly sorry to have put them in that position, but my full sorrow did not appear until I myself went on the road with the book and thought oh me too, I too am not allowed to talk to you about what the book is about. And and so yeah, I had a new appreciation for how tricky this was all going to be. And, and every once in a while I would think, you know, forget it. I want I'm going to talk about the book, I'm just going to tell people what the book is about at my next event and somebody would come along and say, you know, please, please don't, don't spoil the book for people by telling them. And then I would be thinking, oh man I don't, how sad if the person who spoils my book for you is me.

[1:03:04] So we had a long argument about the cover. Initially it was on the back of the hard cover as well and, and, and we discussed it and I was not terribly happy about it, but I was not making a lot of headway, but they sent an early reading copy to the fabulous Ursula Le Guin and she sent a stern letter to the Publishing House saying this would not do the way they had packaged it. So, suddenly it was removed from the hardcover, the telltale information, but clearly, you know, the house had not they had been silenced but not persuaded because the minute the paperback came out they just did not tell me ahead of time they just went to press and there it was. But I had, I had, I was at a school and I had one young woman say to me. "Why did you go to so much trouble to keep it a secret if

you're just going to put it on the back cover?" I thought what a good question. What an excellent question. Yes. I, I yes. It is being pointed out that although Kindle is of course not like reading the actual book that there

[1:04:36] is, there is this one advantage that, that there is nothing on the cover to give it away. Yes, so there is a mystery does still remain. You know, I wanted, I wanted to delay you understanding that Fern was a chimp for exactly the reasons that Rosemary tells you in the book, but I didn't want that moment of revelation to be the point of the book. I didn't want that to be you know, the big 'fooled you' kind of climax of the book. So I wanted to delay it for a while, but I didn't want to delay it you know, I think, I think it's about a third of the way into the book or maybe a quarter of the way in that you find that out. So yes, then there has to be another mystery to keep you going. And so that was the precipitating event that Rosemary is avoiding remembering. Yes, I like the Kafka short story a lot. I'm being asked about the each section begins with a quote from a Kafka short story called *A Report to an Academy*.

[1:05:49] Truthfully, when I began writing the book the quote I had on it was from Bob Dylan, and not Kafka and, and it's even hard for me to explain the quote that I had why exactly it seemed appropriate to me because it the quote was *Miss Jigs. Mr. Jinks and Miss Lucy they jumped in a lake. I'm not that eager to make a mistake*. So you can see that it's not quite as obvious, obviously pertinent as the Kafka story, but somehow there was energy for me and having that quote on the page and and I pictured it being the quote that I used in the book. But what I did at some point just remember the Kafka story, which is if you're not familiar with it, it's it's an orangutan giving a speech to a group of scientists about his experiences being captured and his decision that the only way out of the cage was to persuade everyone that he is actually human and and it's about his efforts to do that and the things that he has done and given up in order to pretend to be human. So once I remember the story it was

[1:07:13] just so apt to what I was talking about that it seemed to me that Bob Dylan was going to have to be jettisoned. Maybe the next book. It was amazing, that was a tremendous adaptation.

[1:07:37] And a little to my embarrassment I was crying at the end. I thought poor Fern, oh, no. So I've never, I've never experienced anything like that. It was just tremendous. Thank you all so much. I loved it. I would love to. I am really looking forward to the Ruth Ozeki adaptation. I plan to come up for that. How the question is how it affects us psychologically to understand that we are not the only intelligent animals. The flip side. How to not understand that animals have intelligence?

[1:08:28] You know, I think again I have, I have my own particular upbringing which was that I am the daughter of a behaviorist psychologist and so in my household

[1:08:46] a few things that were hard to sort of piece together were always clear. One was that we were also animals. One was that, you know, it would be a sin of anthropomorphism to suggest that animals could think and had feelings that resembled human thought and human emotions in any way. This is an argument I probably began to have with my dad when I was six years old and in many



ways the book is my final volley in this argument which, which since he died many, many, many, years ago I expect will be the last word.

[1:09:29] But but simultaneously with that my father was not impressed with human thinking either, really and did feel that we you know that although we pretended to reason that our decisions were often emotionally based we made the decision based on something more primal and then we dressed it up in language and in, in reason. I think that you know, I do feel I hope I am right, that we are on in a period of a sort of sea change in our attitudes towards the other animals and as I said earlier the end of this is this is the result of much scientific study that we do know now, I think, that you know that well... Let me back up a little bit because I am old enough to have sort of lived through several attempts to distinguish us from the other animals so that you know when I was very young we were the tool using animals and now, you know, you only have to spend two minutes on YouTube to see many many animals making tools, and using tools, and then and then we were the animals who use language. That

[1:10:52] was at the time that my book takes place that's where we were drawing the distinction. And and I think, you know, there is something

[1:11:05] in retrospect, a little troubling about our need to be different in some way, our incredible need to pin down exactly where that difference is, but that every time we have tried to do so it has fallen to the wayside so I think that, I think that it's all to the good that we understand that just because it doesn't look like human intelligence does not mean it's not intelligence. And I we have you know, one of the arguments my book is making is that chimpanzees are very like human beings, that they are intelligence does look like human intelligence and it follows from that that human beings are very like chimpanzees, which I feel the current election is showing us.

[1:12:11] But according to the great primatologist Frans de Waal, two things we now know that empathy is a natural behavior, that all of the great apes and many other species as well have a natural empathy, but the flip side the less good news, cause, cause now we sound really nice with our natural empathy is that that the great apes are very insider-outsider based in their thinking and that that empathy only extends to the inside group and that it is, it is not natural to primates to extend empathy to the other. So, I this I think explains very clearly if it needed explanation why every time we go to war the first thing that has to happen is that we have to be persuaded that the people we are fighting are not like us and and therefore not worthy of our empathy. And I was going somewhere else with that thought, but just... Oh, I know that that I come to feel the the what my book in my deepest heart what I hope it does is extend that circle of empathy and it seems to me now that that is the project

[1:13:45] of art and of literature is to extend the circle of empathy to include a wider and wider, to make the us a wider and wider and wider group until all of the the creatures on the planet are inside our circle of empathy.

[1:14:14] I, I, you know, I am asked about the title a lot and I wish I had a better answer than I have because there was a long period when I had no title and then I had the title that's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* and I do not remember how I got from the place with no title to the place where the title I have just completely forgotten how I came about that. But, but my what is my usual experience in writing a book is that, is that I know the title when I hear it so I may run through many titles as I'm writing a book but if I'm still running through them then I haven't found it yet because when I find it I'll stop you know, I'll know that's the title that I want. I will say just as a little aside that on the first three contracts for books that I sold, the title I sold the book under is and that appears on the contract is not the title that the book came out under that I at the point that I sold the book I still did not have the right title for those, those first three books. But the


[1:15:30] way I want the title to work is the way I like titles to work. I don't always achieve this but I like it to mean one thing when you pick the book up and something else when you put the book down and so the title is intended to talk about what I just talked about that, that the world is us and that there is no no other and everywhere we go there we are. And I will say that I had been running titles past my writing group periodically and when I came to this one, I stopped I thought this is the title that I want and the reaction from my writing group was about 50/50 people thinking it was a great title and people thinking it was a dreadful title. So long, you know nobody is going to remember every word so they won't be able to find it in the bookstore, and they won't be able to find it in the library and but they didn't put up a huge fight. I think because they assumed that my editor was never going to allow me to have that title. So, it is I think, it is a great shock to them to see that in fact,

[1:16:39] my editor put up no fight at all. Just one more. Oh, this is a terrible responsibility two more will do two more this one in this one. I did. Yes. I'm very, very fond of Lowell. I admire him enormously. I always. I think for no other reason than I was in UC Davis when the lab was burned down and the Animal Liberation Front did it. So I was aware of them. I knew I even although wild horses could not get me to name names. I even have some suspicions about people in my community who may have who may be part of the American Liberation Front. I could be wrong, in any case it will never matter because I will never say their names out loud. You know, the movie question has been difficult because I cannot allow a live chimp to be used in the movie in any way. They, yes and and so for reasons that are completely unclear to me I am not supposed to discuss this at all and yet some animal lovers in Hollywood have optioned it, they are thinking not of a movie but of a short mini series, television. So whether

[1:18:00] that will actually happen or not is anybody's guess but there has been interest, I have signed a contract the contract includes the fact that every the animals will all be CGI'd and thank you.

[1:18:21] Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen.

[1:18:26] Hello, Chris. Thanks. Can I make one shameless promotion for Book-It Repertory Theatre. We have not one, but two shows being presented right now *The Brothers K* and I placed some flyers right over here with the Elliott Bay Books table and this theatre right here is just about the size of The



Center House Theatre at The Seattle Center. So we invite all of you to come and buy tickets and fill it up for us. Thank you very much for coming tonight.

[1:19:01] This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

