



Library podcast

Jennifer Baker & Dennis Norris II with Anastacia-Renee & More

[00:00:05] Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our web site at www.spl.org. To learn how you can help the library foundation support The Seattle Public Library go to foundation.spl.org. We were excited to celebrate the release of *everyday people the color of life* with the book's editor Jennifer Baker and contributor Dennis Norris II.

[00:00:52] We're also thrilled that we were able to work with civic poet Anastasiou Varane to select tonight's local panelists and we're very grateful for her contribution as well. So I'm going to introduce all of the panelists and then there's a little bit more information about each individual speaker on the bio sheet that you received when you came in.

[00:01:17] If anybody needs one raise your hand at all grabby one after I'm done here. Jennifer Baker is a publishing professional creator and host of the minorities in publishing podcasts and contributing editor to *Electric Literature*. She's also the editor of tonight's anthology *Dennis fores*. The second is 2017 MacDowell Colony fellow 2016 10 House scholar and a 2015 Kim Braulio fiction fellow. Their story where every boy is known and loved was recently named a finalist for the 2018 Best Small fictions anthology. Jennifer and Dennis will be joined by a panel of local artists curated by Anastasiya Renee Anastasio Renee as Seattle's civic poet and the author of four books. She was a 2016 James Ray distinguished Writers Award nominee and a 2016 Pushcart Prize nominee Jessica Rachele is a southern southern interdisciplinary visual storyteller an art director based here in Seattle and she has some beautiful photographs that are part of the *everyday black* exhibition at Nahm that's up through October 20th I think right. Jane Wong's poems can be found in *Best American Poetry 2015 American Poetry Review* and pulp and poetry magazine a demand fellow. She is also the recipient of a Pushcart Prize. Damond. Arendelle is a poet performer playwright and teaching artist. He's a faculty member of freehold theater adjunct faculty at Seattle University. Writer in Residence through Seattle Arts and Lectures writers in the school program and also works with Skagit River Poetry Foundation. There's more information about all of tonight's guests on the bio sheet. As I mentioned tonight's program will include readings and a conversation with these artists and to get us started.

[00:03:11] Please help me welcome Jennifer Baker.

[00:03:23] Thank you so much for being here. I'm from New York so I'm loud by birth.

[00:03:33] There's an echo. Just let me know.

[00:03:37] So I'm so happy to be here in Seattle. My friend was taking me around today so I got to experience the touristy things that I never do in life. So I've been very very excited to be here. This book is two years worth of work and people said when it published. Oh so it's over and I said no it's not.

[00:04:00] What are you smoking. And this is when you're progressing.

[00:04:05] You keep talking about it every day people the color of life.

[00:04:10] It really does culminate a lot of my my personal taste. But I think what really exemplifies what the anthology is about is about the universality of our stories. And as cliché as that may sound and the definition or the description when I say it it really is in charcoal about our stories.

[00:04:33] It is not about us being killed. It is not about our historical trauma of people of color. It is not necessarily about the burdens of being LGBTQ or being disabled or being of color and indigenous. It is really about things that we all deal with. It is about grief. It is about love. It is about figuring out your identity. It is about trying to ascend to another plane and fumbling along the way. It is about seeing what your community is doing and how it is changing and how you may not have any say in what that means.

[00:05:15] And I think those stories are so important for our stories for our people in the marginalized communities see because working in the publishing industry I see that there tends to be these pushing of stories of trauma and I think trauma is necessary in terms of looking at our history and really pondering our place in that and our ancestry. But I also think it is incredibly important and incredibly necessary for us to just experience stories that have beginnings middles and endings that really translate to what we experience in the now. And I know as an African-American says Hett able bodied woman there are many things that I am privileged for and there are many things that I experience as a marginalized person very directly and as an editor. I try to bring that sensibility of a writer as a person who has experienced certain things in America but also who does not know everything that is to the marginalized experience and to respect the artist and what they were bringing to the page and to bring a conversation. And that was very very important to me.

[00:06:28] And so I am very heartened to have Dennis here to also be a member of what it means to be part of everyday people and I am so enthusiastic and so appreciative of all the local based artists for being here. Your presence is so necessary. I'm so glad your voices are in this world and I'm going to say that over and over and over again. I am so glad everyone's voices are in this world. You're important. It is necessary. Finish your stories whatever they may be because it may touch one person it may touch a thousand people but that does not mean it has any less potency in regards to what the art is in the whole world. So that's all I wanted to say and I'm very excited to hear everyone's work and be part of this conversation. So thank you.

[00:07:26] I'm sorry I was so moved by what you have to say. I'm not going to lie I was just basking in the glow of your wonderful words.

[00:07:36] I am delighted tonight as well. And I'm just going to get right into it and share some pieces and then bring up three phenomenal folks.

[00:07:47] I thought about singing I thought about singing a Negro Spiritual today how the vowels might sing down and my pelvis how a ripple of a hum might get hung up in my hyper awareness how my hips could melt when I say swaying how it's hard to rise up when I'm feeling low process. Before the poem during the same week and Orka was killed as Nia on the BART it's not that I don't like orcas.

[00:08:25] I do I like all their relatives and I hate Jews and I am an animal lover. This story about the orca mama who carried her baby her dead baby.

[00:08:36] I get it. Quote I think she's just grieving unwilling at this point to let the calf go.

[00:08:43] Like why. Why. Why.

[00:08:46] Said Ken Balcomb founder and chief scientist for the San Juan Island based Center for Whale Research and Nia how her parents are like y y y tu how they are carrying her like a dead egg like a casket like a grenade like Orco mom's grief like they can feel it but not near as in who is near Azen.

[00:09:13] Where are the articles about Mia. As in what does it mean. As in well what did she do to get stabbed. As in. But on the part as in. But did you hear the one about the grieving Orka mother.

[00:09:27] And there's a video of his mother wailing.

[00:09:30] And I am at the water trying to see to NIA.

[00:09:37] I imagine you dressed as a black orchid in a purposeful gown and all the flowers so soft and bending around your wailing fragrance and Neah it's hard for me to even tell you the depth of what I cannot seem to feel because so many of you are dying all around me. So many niggas on my soul's alter so many funerals for Junia so much blood on the ground like blended coffee for any persons empty Seattle cup and I still can't get to or through the pain Afterburn. So on fire.

[00:10:15] What is the word for burn anymore.

[00:10:19] It's like a rumble in the sky. I cannot pinpoint like a pebble rippling in a veiny haze.

[00:10:35] Hey I'm not from New York but I am country and we are obligated to speak when we come into a room. So I'm cut from a land of red clay and Confederate flags.

[00:10:53] Where are the apples don't fall too far from trees. Whose arm hung lynch black limbs like unripe fruit in the summertime.

[00:11:03] Im a child of the sun summer colors as black as the asphalt bottoms of our feet Sun kissing our cheeks like mama do little limbs dangling like twigs in the wind as we sailed into Sapphire Skies on swing sets. We were young and restless as Big Mama stories wild and untamed till the rain came a lot enlightening pranks between the clouds like drunken stick figures while the Lord works. I'm cut from Sunday mornings.

[00:11:38] Long white skirts and gaudy crowns wingtips and tie clips pinstripes and windowpanes cut from tent revival and Holy Ghost where black hands double clap like thunder clasp between palms and black voices plead the red blood of a black Jesus at White altars where tambourine rings ring like freedom bells and black body sway under the influence of stained glass windows.

[00:12:05] I am from a land of red clay and Confederate flags. Where the apples still don't fall too far from the trees whose arms hung lynched to black limbs like unripe fruit in the summertime.

[00:12:21] I was born in the cradle of segregation and sang there is a part of me always always aching for home.

[00:12:45] Wow I'm kind of a little stunned. I think I need a moment. So excited to be here I'm from jersey so. The first poem I'm going to read it's called mad and it's kind of written like Mad Libs. So you'll hear the blanks. Madde

[00:13:14] Jane deceived by time and again should not but she slept with curled fists. The rat catching a bus wins ugly and coarse but beware of strangers who. And when your and lick the sweat off your nose and the falls just to taste their own. Do not pause to watch insects like dangling lights or soft speckled bodies. I may Nuka a buzzing dandelion seeds have already you in the neck. Blood on their spindle tongues. This is a metaphor for there are no wolves in this tale only handsome with green eyes who will tell you you're a soft ass then they will carefully cut and Jane called intense surely heads spun owls struck stating If only she called feisty talks to them or talks too often too smart for good. I never thought you'd be looking like you have big eyes for the Kearsley strong or weak. It's just and it's for the best. Her hair though is the best. And remarkably like kindling and OK for to touch light or ingest in the flames strands by Strand ignore when she says or this is of Jane Jane rub salt all over her body to become a dissolving and thus rightfully so. Right out of this world was

[00:15:30] New York born and raised is called Poppy mental.

[00:15:37] It's accentuated phonetic pronunciation always sounded like an apology Poppy meant to something a mother would say and attempts to get child to understand the complexity of whatever transgression father had just committed this time.

[00:15:56] Your father means well you know that right. I know your father didn't mean to you know that right. I am your father loves you. You know that right. I know puppy Monteux is a Creole language including parts of Portuguese Spanish Dutch French and Arawak and Poppy Demento native language of Aruba. I can give the gift of love. Meet dusty mambo with a sincerity that does not feel foreign without hesitation. In English the words don't sail they are anchors in my mouth. Dead weight. Not worth sharing.

[00:16:37] I've never been fluent but the words have never tasted wrong on my tongue.

[00:16:42] Their flow feels bittersweet a texture I savor a flavor that stings goodbye has too many letters makes it last longer than it needs to be Monteux it is oh no consonants to trip over just the exits of sound the leaving of breath and the body follows suit. Taking the heart along for the ride never is no longer sounds like noon time an appointment like there's a possibility in the future a chance to believe in believe is Kere care carry compassion compass pointing in the direction home. That means truth sounds like bear down burden a weight that owns you Mantega is lie a mental tear of Rip like a string.

[00:17:36] You can't stop pulling all I know I said like an incantation but even when Magic receives our faith it is no easier to hear or say but dressed in a different tongue.

[00:17:52] There is so much we can pretend.

[00:17:55] Thank you.

[00:18:09] Since we're talking about geography. New Jersey born Ohio bred New York rent paying

[00:18:22] Jersey in the house. So I'm just going to read two quick scenes from the story that is included in everyday people and I want to extend a special shout out of gratitude to Jen for including me in this anthology because I get to be placed among a bunch of writers that I admire very very deeply.

[00:18:43] For many reasons this is called Last Rites.

[00:18:57] Someone will come. Sirens will sound in the distance. Lights will rise from darkness like seraphs dancing red and blue. Salvation will be brought by man sent from God. These men will come from the east. There is a campus not too far in that direction. A satellite of the State University the men will move as quickly as possible along the highway over black ice close to the barrier that divides east and west. Trademarks will lead them to an indentation in the guardrail scratched with white paint. The men always moving will jump down from their trucks rubber boots clomping to the pavement with the strength of hooves. One of them will wonder aloud how that white car got all the way down the hill by the quarry. You can hardly see it. He'll say with his hand at attention his eyes will strain under the swirling clouds that block the moon that mute the stars. Another braver will lead them over the guard rail hooves romping easily down the hill they will follow the path cut by the car as it flipped over and

over and landed on its now caved in hard top. The Reverend remains strapped in his seat upside down his nose only inches from the ground unable to move his Toyota crashed into a tree with such force that several branches heaving from the weight of the snow broke from the trunk tumbled through the wintery air and landed on the overturned car.

[00:20:27] Periodically the tree creaks warning him at some point he knows it will give under the excess weight. But by then he will be saved. The men will have come and gone and in between ripped him free. They will come shouting into their walkie talkies demanding backup cursing not caring if their words offend him. The glare from their flashlights will find him. Then blamed him. Someone will shout for the men at the top of the hill to aim their headlights at the quarry. Give them some light though Toyoda's fights will be extinguished. By then the battery will have died. Once there is light. The Reverend will see how the snow has frozen beneath him. How every window has shattered the car he gave his 16 year old son eight years ago crumbled around him as though it were nothing more than a toy a matchbox model like the ones Davis used to play with the youngest newest trooper will Neil as close to the car as possible. He will extend his arm through the broken window he will shine his flashlight into the reverend's face an up and down his body. Are you hurt. He will ask Davis. The Reverend will ask the man is it you sir. Are you hurt. Can you move the trooper's voice will ring with easy authority over more sirens sounding in the distance coming their way over the slow rumble of traffic that will begin to pile up.

[00:21:49] Though it's after midnight and the roads are relatively bare. Over the chatter of the Reverend's teeth. For by this time he will be delirious and so cold that his words will be nearly unintelligible. The Reverend will try to turn his head until he can see the troopers eyes. He will try but he will fail. He will know that the trooper's voice is not his son's voice. The troopers hands large pale and strong are not his son's hands. You will wonder if these are the hands that will keep him alive bring him to safety. He will wonder if safety is what Davis sees in that man the white one the one he plans to marry. He will wonder if Davis ever saw these things in him. Sir. Don't worry we're going to get you out of here sonny boy. He will say everything is going to be fine. And need my son I need to see my son. People say your son isn't here. He's safe. It's only when this car the trooper will consider the fact that he too would be thinking of his son. If it were him trapped in that seat hanging upside down waiting for help to come with his free arm he will slowly reach his hand the broken window until he can gently press his palm against the driver shoulder. He will do his best to look the driver in the eye sir.

[00:23:06] We're going to get you out of here.

[00:23:11] The Reverend caught glimpses of the quarry when the car tumbled down the hill. Every so often because his ears are well-trained to the noise of the creek that travels along his property he hears the water moving Underneath the party's icy surface. Everything normal as is going about its day. He knows he must be perched near water's edge. He listens. A young boy screams. The sound is faint distant but present he remembers when those horrific screams came from Davis an aftershock of his mother's death. Davis and Olivia without a mother a reverend without a wife. Davis at 5. Practically a toddler a Rugrat. His sister already a woman. The first time Davis screamed just hours

after the funeral Olivia awoke bounding from her bed and ran to her brother's aid. It was she who stood beside him momentarily unsure of what to do as she witnessed Davis twisting turning shrieking like a thing possessed senses gone limbs flying every which way she turned on the bedside lamp took a seat on the bed and wrapped her arms around him. The next morning the Reverend sat at the kitchen table head aching in his hands doing his best to listen. I stayed with him until his arm stopped moving until he stopped kicking Olivia said.

[00:24:24] She was pouring coffee into a travel mug her suitcase by the door. Her back turned to him. After she set the coffee pot down she went to the refrigerator looking for milk. You're going to need to watch him. He could hurt himself. He was asleep the whole time. Her voice was low and serious. Olivia what. She stirred a packet of sugar into the mug and glanced at the reverend when she tapped the spoon twice against the mugs brim her face didn't change not a smile nor a glimmer of softness but she answered his unasked question. I have to go exam's he remembers the sound of her boots clicking across the hardwood floor as she walked from the kitchen through the living room pulling her suitcase behind her. How much she looked like her mother short darker skinned but shapely as she had been with a head nearly shaved like hers. She stopped in the foyer and turned around for a moment looking at him eyes blinking. How could you not have heard him screaming like that. He closed the door behind her and slumped against it. His cheek sticking to the glass. Olivia had worn her mother's perfume.

[00:25:31] Thank you. I'll get ready grab a mike check check check

[00:25:47] Everything from Kansas City.

[00:25:51] I'm so excited to ask these questions and I'm going to ask that everybody chime in if you like but also don't feel like you have to chime in. There is nothing like

[00:26:03] Feeling like you have to child but of course I want you out of time.

[00:26:08] My first infamy burning question is directed at you. What are three epiphanies or aha moments you had during the process of editing.

[00:26:21] It's incredible work. One is that all writers are liars. Let me quantify that

[00:26:32] When people say they'll get you something in two weeks. That's a lie. When I say I'll get you edits in two weeks. That's a lie.

[00:26:42] I think that's I think it's the assumption that creativity is something you can put a finite amount of time on. It's not something you can time stamp. You know it's like I'll get this done an hour five hours later. You're still figuring it out. I think that's Epiphanny one. Tiffany 2 is that this is something I learned very long ago is that adults are not necessarily adults and that

[00:27:11] You almost made up his mind. You. Said that

[00:27:16] And that not everyone can take critique even if you are artists and that that's just something that comes with the territory.

[00:27:26] And I think the third epiphany is that I recognize my limitations. More so and that's why I always ask a lot of questions and I recognize that people will when I ask a lot of questions people think assume that means I'm judging them or I think they're stupid. And it's like no I don't do group. I don't do mass hysteria. I need to know exactly what is happening and not everyone responds well to that. The meaning of life

[00:28:02] If you craft the meaning of life I wanted to talk to you after this because I might need some help that.

[00:28:09] Well this is for all of you. Why do you think it's necessary for readers to have access to all PEOC anthology

[00:28:25] Ok. I'll go first. Because I got to cash a check. So. I was paid cash money. Yes. OK.

[00:28:38] So some.

[00:28:40] A few years ago I was in graduate school. And let me start out by saying actually that this anthology I think it says it somewhere on the on the book. But it's kind of done in the tradition of some anthologies that Langston Hughes actually put together many years ago which I think were called the best stories by black writers. And I think there's I think there's two of them. And when I was in graduate school which was very early in my trajectory as a writer I was really struggling with how I wanted to deal with the topic or the issue of race in my writing. And I think there's a lot of reasons why I was struggling with that. I think a lot of young writers of color think about that before we begin to figure out how we want to approach our work. And for me I was in a graduate school with a lot of white students almost all of my professors were white and I was asking some of them about this. And most of them were like wow I really don't know what to tell you. But here are some books and they handed me Toni Morrison's playing in the dark. And they also told me to get this collection out of the library which I did. And it meant so much to me because here was a space where I found stories that really reflected my experience in a way that a lot of things didn't like I didn't have to think about the universality of everything. The more directly spoke to me and it began to help me formulate how I wanted to write about race and who I wanted to write about which was not old rich white people which is kind of what I had been doing before all disclosure and mostly straight to not interested in

[00:30:27] I'm going to say the obvious answer and just say representation matters a whole life specialty. As PEOC writers see I mean I'm a black queer like person who subscribes to like nonbinary representation there are many places that I can go on like this will probably touch multiple parts of my experience. I think in a lot of a lot of times we look at representation or lack of representation and we're so excited to fill that that we fill it with the most obvious thing and not the truest thing not the most authentic thing not the most well rounded thing. And so for me it's important because even as a

single person there are several different sides to my story. There are there are stories that live within me that contradict each other and are always true and always true. And I think when you have an anthology that is all PEOC you get so many different versions of stories that are relatable instead of one shade of thing. And I think as as the arts in general and in response to the lack of representation we are all regurgitating very obvious story or very obvious storylines very very cut like everybody's talking about the same thing. But none of our experiences are the same my experiences the same this year as it was last year. So to be able to have a well-rounded body of work that is put forth by people from all different shades of stories is absolutely incredible and I think that's when you started to talk about groundbreaking work.

[00:32:01] I think to add to that I think for the writers in the anthology it feels so good to know that you're not the token. You know I mean like you're like oh

[00:32:13] That's why I'm in this thing.

[00:32:15] And it feels good to be among people that you love and admire and feel comfortable and at home with it's kind of it's a total gift.

[00:32:25] It's it feels. I don't know that kind of heart space of just yeah. This feels good. I have other words for that. But it's special it's not been my experience.

[00:32:37] And you know other anthologies that you feel like oh at least for me.

[00:32:42] Oh I needed a Asian American writer. Let's let's just throw her in. And it feels weird to sit next to on a page with someone who doesn't really understand or come from a you know somewhat similar background or at least an understanding of the world beyond kind of what you're mentioning this white rich kind of experience.

[00:33:04] So it feels almost like a neighbourly.

[00:33:09] No no that's the right way. But it feels kind of like neighborly to have all these writers together.

[00:33:15] All G because it's necessary. It's just simply unnecessary. The Canon has been in existence for how long and has been primarily predominantly white and male. For how long.

[00:33:31] So we're trying to counter that trying to balance that until we get to a place where an all PEOC book feels like Wow no big deal until we get to that point. It's necessary.

[00:33:47] And to add to that I think for everyday people specifically it was originally an all black anthology. My friend Brooke Stevenson passed away three years ago and this was his origination. And then I came in and I heard the title it was finalized every day people and I said well I feel as

though that should be inclusive of all proceeds Asian American Pacific Islander Latina and indigenous was very important and happy indigenous day.

[00:34:18] And that was just very very important to me because again I'm recognizing more of what I don't know.

[00:34:25] And so when I talk to other people about this it really was I really want to be as representative possible and I think there are things I would have changed about the process.

[00:34:36] There are things I would have had that were included but it was really important for me to come to people and say this isn't all PEOC anthology and not that there's anything wrong with an all black or all Latinos are all Asian Pacific or all indigenous. We need all of that. But I said I wanted to be inclusive of that and also learn from what I do and don't know and have those conversations. And the reflection of what I do know as a New Yorker and what I don't know is a New Yorker. What I don't know can fit the graphic and can

[00:35:09] What I do know probably that this bottle. I don't know. Having all PEOC is anthologies brings us together. I really feel like it brings us together because we can be you know oh that's the white space and this is the PEOC space. But there are still issues within the space that we need to work out as well.

[00:35:30] I'm so lucky I get to just listen feel full already. Ok maybe I lied maybe this is my favorite question.

[00:35:40] What do you say to folks who are using words like diversity and inclusively as buzz words but without action or lacking evidence in the belief of those words.

[00:35:53] Going on a tirade I'm a set back.

[00:35:59] Honestly I ask what is that. What do those words mean to you. That's where it starts. So if it's a buzz word that usually means it's something on the surface. So if you want me to show up to something but then I'm not part of the organization. Beyond that well where's the diversity in the rest of the program.

[00:36:19] The need for parity and that's the thing I talked about there is that Galvano Brooklyn Nine Nine. The show Brooklyn nine nine and they had the diversity panel and then the cast went and said wow this is a very diverse diversity panel. It was all white men visibly white men. But they were diverse because they were different ages and they were different sizes and maybe someone was gay or maybe someone was straight. But that was there. Like the use of diversity has become a buzz word because it can mean anything.

[00:36:54] You could literally have all straight black people and were diverse but we're not necessarily representing all LGBTQ community or were not representing trans Honorary Committee were not

necessarily represented the stable community. So is that diversity. So then we have to ask what does diversity actually mean because it can literally be a straight line without any kind of edgy sense adjacency or parallels or anything other representation to it.

[00:37:24] So I always kind of dig deeper and I am very hesitant. People say this is diverse.

[00:37:31] What does that mean. What does that mean to you.

[00:37:36] So I try to say inclusive a little bit more but then I thought about what what was it was. Angela Davis said it wasn't diversity it was it was it was representation because we need to be represented. We don't want to be asking for a seat at the table we should already be.

[00:37:56] Yeah. I think a lot about. I agree with you about how the word diversity is like really very surface and I think both inclusive city and representation are far more specific words than diversity. I think it's been kind of diluted. But my I mean my first response will probably be to roll my eyes and then make a face and then say OK show me the receipts.

[00:38:23] Thank you Whitney.

[00:38:26] And what I mean is that OK. There's like there's there's not a surface level of diversity that you're doing for a show and so it's like OK we want this writer of color to be on our reading series so you come and you read and then you're the only writer of color in a lineup of five or six writers or are you the only queer writer in a lineup of five or six writers and so then you're like OK this was probably just for show and then there's like thinking about doing further research right. Like what who is running this tweeting series like water. What are the what are they doing in addition to that. Like what. Like what's the actual work that they're doing besides just reading series if it is more than a reading series. Or you can look at a masthead of a publication or a publishing house and think of the same thing right. It's like it's it's you're talking about a seat at the table and it's like OK are you sitting at the corner of the table as your plate of food about to fall off the table. Are you or are you sitting at the head of the table or are you sitting right in the middle of the table and I think that our industry is definitely getting better but I think that it's a real challenge and just sort of a quick example Jen and I were both at the house writers workshop this summer which is I love to house. I think 10 is amazing. I've been there twice. I think Jenna has been there twice.

[00:39:42] And there were some real significant issues around diversity at the workshop this summer and you can learn more specifically about that if you go to Jenna worth whom's podcast for the New York Times still processing because she was there to see what they did a whole episode about it. But there was there was a primary incident and there were a lot of other incidents sort of in the different workshops and in the classes and there were students who were workshopping pieces that were really problematic in racial ways in ways dealing with sexuality and identity. And it was a real conversation piece the whole week and I think the lesson that the great folks at 10 House came away from that week with as they were like wow we need to maybe be rethinking about how we're evaluating our applicants like we're trying to bring in diverse writers. But who is sitting at the table

reading and evaluating the work that we're choosing to award at our workshop and who we're choosing to give scholarships to be here and who we're admitting versus the they admit around 25 or 30 percent of the applicants for that workshop usually. And it's like who's getting to make those decisions and then which writers in our space which students in our space are being rewarded for the work that they're putting in and who's spending money to be here. It's it's so it's not just like the output and who and and who they're there promoting. It's like who's at who's literally at that table making those getting to make those decisions.

[00:41:06] Ditto Ditto Ditto. Ditto Ditto.

[00:41:09] I'm going to turn it over to the audience. Do you have any questions for our lovely folks.

[00:41:17] You can just shout it out and then I'm going to translate it for you in case I can't hear you.

[00:41:27] You gave me really big homework. I'm trying to figure out a way to like make your question. Do you want to know do do most of the people on the panel choose to identify by gender or race or sexuality or

[00:41:46] Is it more of a big or universal god like spirit.

[00:41:51] I mean can I go first.

[00:41:53] Okay. I think this is a great question.

[00:41:55] I think it's important and I can give you my labels and they are like I am black I am gay slash queer. I am nonbinary. I am presenting these are all labels that I use to identify myself when I feel like I need to do that. But I identify as a person first and I always tell people that because whenever I'm asked that question it's like you're asking me to choose what part of myself.

[00:42:20] But all of them are parts of one person.

[00:42:22] I'm not a pie. Like I like you can't just cut off a slice. And so I understand like that.

[00:42:35] I understand why that impulse is there and I think that your impulse in terms of how you responded to hearing about her being asked that question is really important because very often people want to pigeonhole us but we are spirits and we're not to be pigeonholed and I think I really began to think about this in a very deep way.

[00:42:54] I mean years ago but earlier this year when I kind of came out as nonbinary and like I have been thinking about my gender identity and performance for a while and when I embraced that language it was because I felt like there wasn't language other language that reflected how I felt. And I think that very often that's the case with label with these labels.

[00:43:11] The whole purpose is to reduce something but what human being wants to be reduced like you want to be full I said.

[00:43:22] I'd like to think of myself as a full person too.

[00:43:28] I say that jokingly but I had it took me a while to get here. It took me a while to get here. I. There were a lot of labels that I just think the danger with identifying as a thing is that like you sort of start to like parts of yourself against other parts of yourself. You started the war with yourself in the same way other people wore with your identity. And I was sort of happening to me like I grew up in middle of Georgia and a very Christian home as a very masculine child very masculine girl who like walks like a boy wanted to play sports could grasp for fun shit like that. Like I wasn't your average girl in the south. There was nothing Southern belle ish about me. But even when I got to the place where I was starting to try and understand my sexual orientation I was totally against being gay. And people would ask me about that all the time like people ask me because I was a boy and girl are you gay all the time. I'm like No and I would get offended because I'm just like that label means that label like especially in the south. These these labels are not the same. Geographically either like gay here is totally different than country southern southern guy. I was just joking with somebody about this like I had never known they pronoun any of that language at all.

[00:44:45] I'm from a place where it's like are you gay or not like that's you're either gay or you straight. That's that's that's what it is because I wasn't in a place where I understood that there was some room like wiggle in now or to find myself in part of that spectrum. I was just like totally cut off to that and that like fried self-hatred which turns into suicidal tendencies you end up becoming all of these things and taking all these burdens and like essentially killing the spirit because you're fighting labels. So I there there are labels that I ascribe to selectively like whatever I feel like it. But for the most part I'm just like me. And every every shade of me and every every side and dimension of that is a part of how you get the story that you got from me that night. None of that. You can't. I can't pick out a gay part of that story. I can't pick out a country part of that story. If I were to do that it would totally demean the integrity of the work. So I tried to to see myself in the way that I see the art. And that's that's a process getting there.

[00:45:46] I usually do the labels because former privilege standpoint because I recognize as someone who says gender heterosexual able bodied that I enter this space expecting things as a gendered heterosexual able bodied person. So I don't think about a lot of things because of that privilege. So I feel like yes I am a person I am a black person. You know there are some places where I go like when I do residency in Wyoming I'm like holy crap on black. Like I'm really black. Because you just recognize you're like wow I literally feel a ha

[00:46:25] Here. And when I go overseas I feel American. You know like there's just certain things that when you're in a space you feel that way.

[00:46:33] But when I go to spaces and present and talk I usually say I have ASEs gendered heterosexual able bodied black woman for the sake of not having to pigeonhole the person who is not that you're not.

[00:46:46] I mean so it's not like yeah I'm Jen. Well they're gay.

[00:46:52] And so to try to level the playing field of saying I recognize what I represent and that isn't all of me. But I feel like I need to come into this these spaces and say this is who I am so that it becomes a bit more normative that we're just not assuming everyone's straight. We're not assuming everyone's abled we're not assuming everyone says I just want to be part of that kind of change of the vocabulary and the expectation so that's usually why I say it so that someone else doesn't have to feel like that because if they aren't that then they're not the norm.

[00:47:28] They're not the default. I want us to get out of the default mode essentially and that's something I'm learning and I'm learning it every day. So I'm working on it but I'm not perfect at it yet.

[00:47:38] I'm trying and speaking to privilege. So you brought this up because of Shirley and her being in a place as as a black woman being asked this question what's harder being black or being a woman. And it immediately made me think whoa who was it asking the question. Probably a white male because looking at her. Those were the two things that he did not identify as. And so she was other in that process. So what is that. What does that mean. What does that look like. What is that like for you. We all want to feel like ourselves us little kids who they are. I'm me and then we start getting labeled and put into boxes. And it's not that it's a problem to be a certain race or be a certain ethnicity it's the attributes that get assigned to US based off of those things. So if you're black if you're a woman if you're CIS if you're trans etc etc. Then you must be this you must fit into this box. And those are all limitations and we all just want to be who we are because none of us is just one of those things we are all multilayered and we want to be able to have the freedom to be all of those things and whatever they mean to us.

[00:49:10] Ok two more questions. They kind get awkward and were just going to stare at

[00:49:18] You.

[00:49:25] Would you do this again. I do another anthology probs not. For

[00:49:33] Being honest.

[00:49:38] I think only because of the amount of time and energy not because of like I'm so happy with the end product.

[00:49:46] I'm very very happy with the end product but it was very stressful and it came at a very stressful time it came after the election year presidential election and it has not been great since then and it's very hard to publicize a book and talk about a book and feel like art is necessary. Now even

though I know inherently it is and then I have my own writing to do and like I said writers are liars. No one is giving me anything on time

[00:50:18] Which is I can laugh about it now.

[00:50:21] So I just think because of the work involved it was it was a lot and there's stuff on the back end that I won't talk about because it's about a beautiful product that's existing and not about you know the trials that led to that and that's the only reason it was just stressful and I'm tired but not because it doesn't deserve to exist just because. But then again someone could come to me tomorrow and say hey I got a check and I'm like Sweet. Let's do

[00:50:51] This like when I talk to some of my friends and then like I had a child and it was horrible and then I'm like wow. And then they get pregnant two weeks later and I'm like you are. Like

[00:51:01] Wow OK. So yeah this is a roundabout answer. Yeah. But it's like no but if there's a check yes. How in New anthologies baby's

[00:51:19] Sex getting right.

[00:51:21] A really good group home. One more question why you have the lovely folks here. Anybody

[00:51:32] Love that question. What advice do you have for emerging writers young or any age right.

[00:51:38] Like you. I wasted so much time thinking that I wasn't a good writer because of the way that I'd naturally write is ridiculous. It's just I mean right like you and I mean there are ways to refine your own voice but I think it's important to like not shy away from that to write the things that you're terrified of. Because most of the time that you're insecure about stuff that probably is the most potent read.

[00:52:05] Read this book. I think that I don't know where I'd be as a writer if I didn't read it. And you know when I was growing up I didn't have a lot of books that featured characters and stories that were like mine. So the more and more of these anthologies are made the more and more you know there will be you know writers of color who can see themselves and they will read and then they will write. So read read read and read the writers that you feel deeply connected to and return to them as if they are literally like on the sofa with you. I think that's really important. And I will say to for as as a as a professor as a teacher what we need more you know teachers professors of color because they're the ones I want to teach. You know. This is what we need and we need anthologies because I keep making like you know little packets of things I can't find an anthology that has the things I want in it. And so this has to happen in order for young emerging writers to read. Anne's ends right. Yes. So thank you for this anthology.

[00:53:20] I'd also say be ok with failing it's OK and failing means that success means different things to people and failing means different things.

[00:53:31] People fail and could be. I never finished that poem. Success can be. I got and so the new yorker or I just finished something.

[00:53:38] You know what I mean.

[00:53:39] I think measuring these not by what other people are doing but by what works for you as an individual is very key. And that is what helps people progress. You know I'm not looking to the New York Times bestseller I'm looking for people to find this book. And that's enough for me.

[00:53:58] At the end of the day. But I think if your goals are very very high and lofty that can set you on a very bad transition

[00:54:07] Where nothing is good enough I think to just be okay with succeeding and what does success mean and being okay with failing and what is failing mean because it doesn't mean you won't produce anything ever. It just means OK this just didn't work out.

[00:54:23] I think I'm paying attention to your your impulses and your interests and the things that excite you and the things that maybe keep you awake at night is really important because it's important to feel like what you're writing and working on is alive to you because it takes so much time and so much work to write something and to get it into a place where you're potentially ready to try and put it out into the world and you want to put it out into the world and feel proud of yourself but also like it's important to kind of be gentle with yourself. And sometimes sometimes it's OK to you know sit. I like to think of writing as some days I sit down to write and I might write for a couple hours and I can produce a whole lot of words and sometimes they're all right and some most of the time they're not but sometimes I sat down to write for a couple hours and I am maybe I've written one sentence or maybe the page is still blank and I still give myself credit for doing that for taking that time out of my otherwise very busy life for devoting the brain energy to my work because I have mentally been engaging with it in that time and that it's important to give credit to yourself for that because sometimes even if you don't get it out onto the page or get it right that day that brainwork plant some kind of seed that that could become very important to you later on. So always give yourself credit and be kind to yourself the world is difficult enough. Like like editors are difficult to. Actually

[00:56:00] Know Jack Jennings. They. Write

[00:56:04] Right.

[00:56:06] But you work and if you ever go outside.

[00:56:09] You're very lucky she's completely brilliant. But like the world it's hard enough so be kind to yourself

[00:56:16] All of that and write a lot.

[00:56:22] Keep writing. So it's only failure if you let it stop you. We learn from our mistakes and that's what helps us to progress and get better and to change and to grow. If we stay open to it. If each of us stops you know after the first time we fell we'd also be crawling but we learn from our mistakes and it's important to write even when you don't feel like a writer when you don't feel like you're good at it. Poet that I know talked about how his father is an engineer he doesn't stay home when he doesn't feel like an engineer. He goes to work every day. So you have to put in the work. Craft requires work and practice and discipline.

[00:57:07] Treat it like that as opposed to being talented put in the work and we get better thank you.

[00:57:24] 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.