



Recorded Events

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #382

00:00:02 Peggy Sturdivant

Good evening, and welcome to reading number 382 of the It's About Time Writers Reading series. The series was founded by Esther Altshul Helfgottt in 1990 and dedicated to the memory of her mother, Anna Helfgottt, who began writing at age 70. It's also dedicated to the memory of Nelson Bentley, the quintessential teacher, who gave Anna and scores of others help and hope. It's About Time is dedicated to an end of racism, homophobia, anti-semitism, homelessness and war. It is my pleasure tonight to welcome three readers, Mary Jean Lord, Erica Bauermeister, and Judith Skillman. First of all, I like to, you know, wish Mary Jean in advance a happy 90th birthday next week. I'm tempted to sing ... [inaudible] it stretches out the joy of the birthday, as it moves. So Mary Jean is going to be our first reader, and she grew up in, Twin Falls, Idaho, (I'm going to put it speaker on mute here) Mary Jean grew up in Twin Falls, ID, was educated in Idaho and Washington schools and has been a reader as long as she can remember, and a writer almost as long. In addition to raising five children in Yakima, she was a columnist, editor, press secretary and energy resource specialist for various newspapers, for Congressman Mike McCormack (who it is worth noting was a Democrat in the 4th District! perhaps one of the only) and Klickitat County Public Utility (respectively). Lord moved from Goldendale to Seattle in 2014. and it has been a pleasure to write with her and hear her writing ever since then. Welcome Mary Jean.


00:02:20 Mary Jean Lord

Thank you. I'm reading "Our Family's Mississippi Summer." Dick read the letter and handed it to me. It was a call from the American Federation of teachers for volunteers to spend the six weeks of their 1965 summer break with the freedom schools in Mississippi. My husband was a math teacher at Yakima Valley Community College and a member of the AFT. As soon as I read it, I knew he was going. Everything in me screamed: No! Civil rights work was dangerous and potentially lethal. I could stop him. And I had five good reasons to say, no, our five children: Margaret 11, David 10, Catherine almost 9, Evelyn 4 and Roberta 2. And there was Maude Dicks. Mother who lived with us. She was confused and paranoid with Alzheimer's. How would she feel with Dicks absence? And what about me? Why was I always the one stuck at home? While Dick did exciting, important things. I would

much rather go to Mississippi and stay home to worry. Moreover Dick's salary was our only income. Yakima was as racist and segregated as a southern town and being a civil rights worker, which could jeopardize his job. The idea was preposterous. Civil rights was something other people did, even, as I marshalled my arguments, I knew he would go and I would let him, I was as fully committed as Dick to civil rights. I could not say no. When a day or two later Dick asked me "Well, what do you think?" I answered firmly even if I couldn't hold back, my tears. Yes, of course, you have to go. I have sometimes wondered what might have been if I had said, no, he would not have gone and part of him would have felt relief. I believe it would always have lain between us a sense of shame that we had not measured up to who we believed we were. Dick wasn't a typical volunteer. At 38, he was older than most, with a family. A big bear of a man over 6 feet and 50 pounds overweight, but he had useful knowledge, experience and skills. He knew government and politics. He was he was a good listener and a gifted teacher. More important, he didn't think of himself as a hero. He knew the real heroes were those ordinary Mississippians who risked jobs homes, even their lives for the right to vote. They couldn't leave at the end of the summer as he would. He was going to show support to learn and to rehearse turn to fight racism at home. The AFT sent forms to fill out and an information packet. I was riveted on the security bulletins, which set forth several pages of rules for civil rights workers. I understood the security bulletin was meant to discourage anyone who thought spending the summer in Mississippi would be a lark, but that didn't make it any less terrifying. For example. No one should get go anywhere alone, but certainly not in an automobile and certainly not at night. When getting out of the car at night, make sure the cars inside light is out. If it can be avoided, try not to sleep near open windows. Try to sleep at the back of the house, i.e. the part farthest from a road or street. Do not stand in doorways at night with a light at your back. The AFT would pay \$300 for bus fare to and from Jackson plus a stipend of ten dollars a week. Ten dollars a week was standard pay for all civil rights workers from lowly volunteers like Dick, to the northern lawyers who rescued volunteers from jail, to John Lewis, president of SNCC. We couldn't afford a plane ticket, but as word of his plans got around, friends, a few churches and organizations sent small donations of support, and it was enough to buy a round trip air ticket. I thanked these sponsors later that summer by twice mailing out newsletters about what he was doing culled from his letters home. After school was out in June. My mother came and took our two older girls, Margaret and Catherine, home with her to Twin Falls. My sister also lived there, and they would have cousins to play with. I promised to go after them in two or three weeks. The morning of June 27th, 1965, friends drove Dick and me to Portland. At the airport. Dick mumbled a hasty goodbye and hurried off to catch his flight, not pausing to look back and wave. His good buddy was hurt, but I knew Dick was close to breaking down. As for me. I was a wreck I felt as if I had sent my husband off to war. And in a way, I had. Dick arrived in Jackson just as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party and SNCC staged, a March in protest of the all-white legislature meeting at the in the state capital. The evening news was filled with images of state, and local police beating and arresting more than 300 protesters. They were jailed in the animal pens at the State Fairgrounds under appalling conditions. Protesters tried to March the next day and the day after that, but all were arrested and imprisoned at the fairgrounds. Dick called to assure me that Freedom School teachers were not expected to March. But of course they did. I watched the news

anxiously each night fearing Dick was among those taken to the animal pens. Dick didn't march until bodies became so scarce, he could no longer avoid it. It happened that that day, the Fifth District Court of Appeals, ruled forbidding police from interfering with peaceful protesters for the first time. Dick's group of 150 actually marched two abreast on the sidewalk for two grueling hours. Thirsty, footsore, in humid 95 degrees heat watched by local County and state [inaudible] police, which far outnumbered the protesters. For those first few weeks. I couldn't eat or sleep. I tried to appear calm and reassuring. Not wanting to infect the children and my mother-in-law with my fears. Mom watched me closely for Clues on how she should feel. Fortunately. She had no idea what Dick was doing and I thought to tell her that Mississippi was a dry State and Dick wouldn't be drinking. I was so absorbed in my own fears that at first, I didn't fully appreciate how much Dick's absence affected the children. The first week after he left I took Roberta and Evelyn to the library. They love going to the library, but I had to cut our visit short when Roberto threw a tantrum tearing books off the shelves, even trying to pull the fire extinguisher off the wall. Only two years old, she couldn't explain that her father always took them to the library, not me. The children and I waited eagerly for Dick's weekly telephone call. Long Distance calls were expensive and we kept them short. Instead, Dick and I wrote each other every day. At night after Maude, and the children were in bed. I would go downstairs to Dick's basement den and type out, my thoughts fears and doings on an ancient electric typewriter with only uppercase letters and a worn-out ribbon. I had a good selectric upstairs on my desk, but being surrounded by Dick's things felt comforting. Keeping busy was my way of combatting fear. There were household chores to be taken care of the picture tubes, on the early color, TV died and the clutch gave out on the VW van. Maude and the children expected three meals a day, even if I couldn't eat and there was a constant stream of visitors. We were active in the Democratic party and the Unitarian Church and I published a monthly Journal of liberal opinion. I also had responsibilities on the mayor's committee on human rights and I was trying to substitute for Dick as well. I gave blood because he always did. He was on the board of Yakima County Community Action. And I worked with the board that summer to bring Vista workers to Yakima. I wrote about the children of course. Roberta heard the back door closed today, and yelled "daddy!" She was sure you would come home. I said, no, daddy's gone. And she said, bus, train, plane? A few days later after you call Roberta, kept going to the phone and picking it up and saying, Daddy thinking you might be there. She came up the stairs today, telling me Daddy was here. She knew better and was pretending, but she insisted. Evelyn said, you must have thought she was sick because you asked how she was. A day a week or two later, Evelyn felt so bad that she didn't get to talk to you. Her eyes start to fill with tears when someone mentions you. David was on his best behavior, trying not to show how lost he was without his father. Maude was very upset one day and I finally got her to tell me someone from her LDS church wanted genealogical information that only her despised brother-in-law would know. I offered to write Uncle tale for the information. Meanwhile, Margaret and Katherine were having a memorable summer with cousins camping, near Sun Valley and touring Craters of the Moon. Mother wrote that Catherine was severely homesick and when was I going to come get them? I couldn't stand to be away from the phone and Dick's daily letters, long enough to go after them. And I delayed. I devoured those letters. Freedom schools are not at all like traditional schools, particularly when the teacher is white. First of all, we are

not primarily interested in teaching the 3 R's, as much as politics, political action and the state and community power structures. Sometimes one can do this in the context of reading or negro history. It's a play it by ear thing. It's very important to get the confidence of the people we work with teach. A large measure of the orientation has been to help us be able to do this Negro, of course, was the polite word in 1964. And tomorrow morning and tomorrow afternoon we'll be canvassing neighborhoods to get students for the first schools. The thing that has me worried now is not my own safety, but the likelihood that I won't measure up when it comes to teaching. I'm all boned up on Mississippi politics and economics. I'm studying negro history. But the real job is going to be convincing people that I'm not mr. Charlie here to sell them, another bill of goods. And another thing, the schools we start are not supposed to run only for the duration of our state. We are supposed to find one or more people in our groups who can take over when we have gone. Amazing as it may seem many of last summer schools are still in operation, though they may have had an outside teacher for only two or three weeks. This whole movement is pretty amazing and often inspiring as well. He wrote: I worked a street called Parker's Alley, very poor economically, but the best area for potential students. I interrupted a big card game at one place and fully expected to get that yassuh boss blank stare treatment, but after I talked to them for a while, the wall, went down a little anyway and we had a real discussion They ask lots of questions and when one of them asked what a freedom school is, I told them that we were having a little freedom school right there around the table. They liked that. I had similar good responses almost everywhere in Parker Alley. For the first three weeks Dick changed his lodging every few days, moving wherever someone had a bed or couch to spare. Then he found an apartment with a white SNCC worker from the North, Hunter Maury, paying \$30 as his share of the rent. For the last three weeks of his stay. It was Hunter's third year in Mississippi, and he was helping organize, a Convention of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Dick was an artist and he made posters for the convention and also Illustrated and helped write a pamphlet on political organization and voting procedures to use in the freedom schools. From Dick's letter, July 17: Everyone is getting ready for the fifth Precinct Mass meeting tonight. We've uncovered enough, local people with leadership qualities in our canvassing that they have taken over the meeting tonight and will probably take over the voter registration project, which of course is exactly the way it should be. Barre Street was the dividing line between blacks and whites. Dick never ventured onto the right side of the line on foot and rarely in the car. Rural areas, outside Jackson were more dangerous. Near the end of the six weeks, Dick's friend from California, Herb Harris, was sent to Carthage to help get a school going but Dick assured me he was too busy to be sent anywhere in the time left. After Dick was safely home, he told me Herb and two black men had been sent to test whether a restaurant that earlier had been integrated still was. It wasn't. Several white men attacked Herb on the porch outside with a baseball bat, breaking his leg. He went home to his family in a cast. I shuddered when friends greeted me with: "I hear you're a widow this summer." I was disgusted with people who proclaim they couldn't be prejudiced because there weren't any Negroes in the town where they grew up and the woman who said all those people need is an education. The big day, finally arrived. My children and I were waiting on the tarmac when Dick's commuter plane landed in Yakima. Evelyn who was 4 remembers, how excited we all were and how



happy she was to be scooped up in her father's arms. My tears this time were of Joy. My man was home safe. Dick said, when he walked into the Portland airport, he saw a sea of white faces. It was all he could do not to walk over and stand next to the only black person in the hall, a sky porter. Dick's aunt came from Portland to stay with Maude. We drove all one nights to Twin Falls to fetch Margaret and Catherine. Our family was together at last. Dick promised he would never go off and leave us again. And I swore I would never let him. Dick died of a heart attack aged 50 in 1977. I put the Mississippi memorabilia away in a box. It surfaced a few years ago, when I was moving. The letters could have been written by strangers our much younger selves. I was surprised how much they resembled love letters. They now reside with Wisconsin Historical Society reputed to be the premier repository for 1960s civil rights memorabilia. I like to imagine that a hundred years from now someone will discover our letters and turn them into a best-selling historical novel.

00:20:11

Oh Bravo. I absolutely thought Love Letters From the get-go. That was wonderful. I have been had the great Fortune to hear quite a bit of Mary Jean's writing over the years. I have to say that is a whole new chapter, that I am so glad that you decided to open and explore. That was absolutely wonderful. So so it's true Dick never did go off again. Oh wait, I was waiting for like, you know, when when he, you know, he promised that you know, you were going to Say that, you know [inaudible] but he really did stay home.

00:20:53 Mary Jean Lord


He did except, you know, small trips to Seattle.

00:20:58 Peggy Sturdivant

I am so glad that those letters have been uncovered in the that you're taking them and I think they would make an incredible Love Story in the future. So, thank you. I forgot to mention when we started that, if anybody would like to do an open mic reading, just let me know in chat for a three-minute open mic. And now we are going to hear from Judith Skillman. Judith is a resident of Newcastle, Washington and dual citizen of US and Canada. Her work has appeared in Cimarron Review, Threepenny Review, Zyzzyva, and other journals. She is the recipient of awards from Academy of American Poets and Artist Trust. Her new collection is which she has put a link up on the chat. You can see the link to the forthcoming book is called A Landscaped Garden for the Addict (Shanti Arts Press, 2021), and you can visit her website at her name .com. Welcome, Judith.

00:22:14 Judith Skillman

It's a pleasure to be here. I once upon a time was in real time that you know, not virtual. This is real time, but I was really at it's about time. It's been a long time and I'm very grateful and honored to be here and actually just really that resonated for me. So much hearing Jean. I'm sorry, Mary Jean, your Your story because I grew up in the 1960s in Prince George's County, Maryland. And attended the first integrated School Greenbelt junior high school and I'll tell you it was it was quite a growing up,



experience to be there and Yeah, I'd like to say we've come a long way but I can't say that. It's very very much the same unfortunately, so I'm glad you're shedding all this light on that and that and those are going to be with the Mississippi Historical Society. So I thought I'd just read a poem from the book that I have in hand, which is by the same publisher or is done by the same publisher. That's doing a landscape Garden for the addict. And it's actually going to look a lot the same. Except it'll be read with a different artwork. This is titled "Late bees." And that is also part of the poem. Late Bees come for sweetness when summer lies dying in the brown yards. I remember the afternoon two got caught in my shirt and stung my breasts. Another year running through Appalachian Forest 3 Hornets stung my lips. September days. Mars setting in the east, as the red God of War. I hear school children at recess recall. My son who told me of hiding in a corner. These hover over meat or above Queen Anne's Lace dried centers Browning. What other memory burns like a coin you lost with your youth? What other waspish Souls gleam, just out of reach like hummingbirds at a red feeder. Sugar water runs out through the jar, placed by a window on a hook. Late Bees enter the house through a torn screen because danger appeals most to those bred on chaos, whose parents came to a strange country out of season out of change. And this book is about my third generation, German Jewish roots and a landscape Garden for the addict has things of addiction, chronic pain and disability. So it's divided into five sections interlaced with existential dilemmas including or they have poems about war, mortality, invalidism, and trauma. Pretty dark subject matter, but I like to think there's no pathos. Anyway, that's what I've said. And that there are points of light and images of Dutch Rabbits, horses, robins, clover, ivy and stars. So I'll read a few from that that collection. Yeah, this speaks to the heat Dome, even though it was written before. This was written the summer before this one. "A July of Julys" Heat on glass. The shifting begins houses, rise to 10 degrees above air temperature, doors, swell in their frames. War contains no people only images. Those who live on Browning Earth landlocked have nowhere to go. Nomads bear no children. Tots with big brown eyes, like deer already sacrificed on agamemnon's altar. Outside Inside. remain countries apart. Fire Burns in the heart blood boils. Pretend water never existed, except in the mouth of the crocodile. The slots of the sprinkler, the scream of the kettle. Years ago, I had back surgery. It was extremely medieval and unpleasant. I like to say. It made me all better, but it did not. But it did make me able to walk farther. It made me more functional. Hooray for function, but it did not ease the chronic pain. It just changed into another kind of chronic pain. But I did. I wrote this just shortly after and have to say just being able to To write things down is such a gift, just such a pleasure to it wasn't a pleasure. Of course. It was just so cathartic, right? The yeoman tells me to walk in a circle beside his ox. For each step I take the brand will seer me. He holds a hot poker. The whole inside grows larger with his prod. I do as I am told. Soon the moon a kind of low-grade fever breaks through blackberry bushes, along the edge of undreamt rashes. The Yeoman governs his small landed estate of which I am become parked, my hips for the use of man, my belly for bearing, and my back a surgeon broke to stretch. Broke to stretch into a long line of mothers. I walk and Yelp the generations generational dance. So, part of the sort of extended metaphor, or conceit of The Landscape Garden for the Addict is Gulliver's Travels, which really had a huge impact on me when I read them because I felt like a Lilliputian. And I am extremely really kind of short and small. And I started to empathize with those lilliputians that were

in the presence of Gulliver and I guess kind of just off the cuff to rip a little. That's that is a lot like being in the presence of a violent, man, and I just edited an anthology of, I'll put that up in the chat, which is when home is not safe. So, there is some of that I guess that maybe creeps into this poem, but it also has to do with imagining that I'm a Lilliputian and that my own neuroses, which are kind of really explored in this book. Being from an exiled people just have just far-reaching ramifications. Written while possessed of a Gulliverian myopia to see the hair stand out on a miniature thistle wedded to a cactus

00:30:07 Judith Skillman

stalk. To see dust on a leaf of the orchid hunched in one corner for lack of sustenance. To want to pull out a cloth and clean the fat green paddle stuck out, flowerless for one year that turned into two. Air roots gesturing, like the arms of a drowning man, to be exquisitely sensitive to the touch of my master, who strokes me with his thumb when I discourse upon our country's Constitution, tales of truth-telling of adjudications passed down, fairly, which he mistakes for attempts at justification. To have to wear my size and live in a shoebox and then to have shat in his hand or this, a telling example of predicament, foisted upon the innocent person who stumbles into a land unrecognizable from home. I wear the overalls, I track the hanging bridge. It swings in winds so strong, they'd snap the firs and yellow woods fill its oaker mushroom beneath the same sun that shines still beneath a sky I don't remember leaving. its dome-like qualities rained in the unknown. This bridge spans a crevasse I recognize from nightmare. The one all my people have. Inheritance blessed us with a negligible amount of introversion spiced with notes of autism, the need for chocolate and distaste for wine. Perhaps this is a thick place. I will try to feed it with as many tiny chickens as my pockets hold and from the left one after crossing through this nomenclature called text a kind of gibberish to his majesty. I pull out a hen and gulping it down whole recall as I swallow the familiar picture learned from anatomy encyclopedias, where a single plastic sheet placed over another, repeated for sets of muscles, organs, bones, Etc., revealed the human body to be simply a machine, a tube containing among other hallways two pipes. One for air and one for food. Their openings placed so close, my mother, may god bless her soul often choked on the Cornish. It's tiny claws tickling her windpipe when I spoke to her. So there's only one or two of those, you know, there's a really short and I spent some time in Cle Elum with my husband. He bought a townhouse there. now as I get older. I find that. It's too much trouble. Just go for a couple of nights. So I tend to just and since he's retired. I tend to just do it as oh great. I have the house to myself and stay here. But there have been some poems inspired by the flora and fauna of Cle Elum. One of those is called "Testimonial." When we lived with the wind, it was good to us. Coming and going when we opened the doors and windows, sighing when we mourned, rustling through green leaves piled in bough and understory. We took the wind into our houses and it disturbed papers and curtains yet the space remained as if nothing had been touched. No burglar bungling an attempt to steal what we'd worked so hard to keep. This fondness for wind held us pinned as with centrifugal force, Highschool sweethearts, who trauma bonded, came apart only when the storm passed. Listen to what I tell you beneath this canopy of worry. My frowned upon husband my upside down smile. Are you there? Or is it only the sound of the fridge turning on in

a kitchen? The heavy breathing of age? The ages since then when we lived with the Wind? And this is a variation on villanelle. "All we took" The rains begin to beat against the glass. Summer flowers replaced by umber leaves? All we took for granted in our ease. A cycle. A circle. How else learned lost? Plump cheeks, tanned legs, soft skin are but a sieve. The rains begin to beat against the glass. As metaphor the same four seasons pass each childhoods, novel. What is there to grieve? All we take for granted in our ease. Monsoons come to loose the rose. It's green caress. Branches held hostage, harsh winds, moan through sleeves. The rains begin to beat against the glass. I feel my body turned back into Moss, a spell of Blues deletes my will to live and all I took for granted in my ease. It's cold in the bedroom where I undress more difficult than ever, to believe the rains begin to beat against the glass all taken for granted when at ease. And I'll just read couple more the title poem, and then one new one, "A Landscape Garden for the Addict". Well, I turned the Earth upside down and cut, back the junipers arms, those dead arteries of wood. I thought of you in your late morning, bed of dreams. I walked around the Japanese maple, picked up the thread of light dances there sometimes. And Turns the world green saw desire rising in the hearty fuchsia. It's red bells and Crimson half-moons moving slightly in the breeze. Making morning seem like evening. The air glittered with overheard telephone conversations and spiders, who amassed their silken avenues, Their chances to connect. Now, I imagine your chin dropped to your chest and you taken in again by the poppy. Every nerve ending waving in unison as if to say it is a far Distance to Paradise, but we may yet arrive. The Grass Grows ragged around the little semblance of order I have reclaimed, but you are brilliant. In your craving, for only the heart of the flower as you fall further into those sleeves of dark, which the high has bought for itself. So I'll circle back to having grown up in Maryland. There were roaches, big ones and it was kind of really scary actually as a kid to like go in the kitchen, you know, at night and then just have everything scatter like that, turn on a light. And so one of my happiest things was moving, when I moved out here and discovered there weren't any, there, aren't any. And certainly not this. The palmetto bug, which is the title of this poem "Palmetto Bug." What was it other than a nightmare of Maryland, kingdom of mosquitoes and lice come to by accident from elsewhere, a transplant, perhaps, from South Carolina. The primal fear I felt when not knowing if it could fly (it could) I pressed myself into as small a space as possible and waited, breathless It's for its reddish carapace to move. Back beneath the planter or else push on deeper into the closet. Oh, please go to Your Motel, the one with a room made especially for you. Bed with stained mattress cigarette holes in the arms of the chair yellow, linoleum floor. Yet, so tropical was the thing it did as a pleased, never completely dying or passing on to another better life. Thank you.

00:39:56 Peggy Sturdivant

Way to end it. Glad we were able to help take you back to your roots and appreciate the Northwest. So,

00:40:05 Judith Skillman

Oh, I do, I love the Northwest. I'm never leaving.

00:40:09 Peggy Sturdivant

Now, you live with the wind all the time,.

00:40:12 Judith Skillman

and it's been almost 40 years,

00:40:16 Peggy Sturdivant

Wow. Some things you never forget. Obviously. I have not heard that anyone wanted you open like so I I would like to take this opportunity to let you know about the October reading. And then we're going to hear from Erica Bauermeister. So in October, we have gotten so we have a lovely tradition happening of doing a crossover event with the Jack Straw Writers. So, we will welcome five Jack Straw 2021 Writers, who were... the curator this year was E. J. Koh and the writers will be joining us in October are C. R. Glasgow, Patrycja Humienik, Greg November, Paulette Perhach and Kristie Song. And now I'd like to welcome Erica Bauermeister, who I was a fan of her Anthology. Let's hear it for the girls. Before I had a chance to meet her in person. So Erica make a peep for us so that we can...

00:41:22 Erica Bauermeister

Hi there.

00:41:22 Peggy Sturdivant

Three you go

00:41:23 Erica Bauermeister

I'm decent.

00:41:23 Peggy Sturdivant

So I was delighted I met her at a school event over pies and was delighted to learn that she was the author of an anthology to help guide me through my daughter's childhood. An incredible Anthology now available. I think still just print-on-demand. Correct? But anyway, that was long ago because now, Erica is a New York Times bestselling author of four novels, including The School of Essential Ingredients and The Scent Keeper (a Reese's Book Club pick). Her latest work is a memoir entitled House Lessons: Renovating a Life. I believe she's coming to us from that house in Port Townsend. So welcome.


00:42:14 Erica Bauermeister

Thank you. Thank you. So, I started writing House Lessons, back in 2001. I had was not yet published, as a writer of my own work. I'd done the readers guides. And the first time I wrote the Memoir, it was very much about what was happening at the time. And I'm glad that I did it. It made me write down a lot of details that then made things very Vivid, but the reality is and that and I think a lot

of you that are writing Memoirs can probably relate to this, you know, you don't have the perspective necessarily that you need to write a memoir when the events are actually happening. Some people are wise in the moment. I am not wise in the moment and it took me 15 years before I actually got to a place where I was able to write the book that I wanted to write about the experiences that I had well while renovating this house and cut to the more universal lessons that people can learn. And so in the end, he became a memoir in essays, and they sort of have three threads. One is the thread of the house itself; one is the thread of our lives and how it changed our lives, and our relationship, my marriage, and our family. And then the third one is really this idea, more philosophical, exploration of the psychology of space and an architecture. And this idea of exploring how the spaces that we live in affect who we are and who we can become. So, I'm going to read three little Parts. The kind of touch on each of those three threads tonight. I'm going to start with the prologue. I'm going to start with the house because that's what you do. The house stood at the top of the hill ensnared in vegetation looking out over the Victorian rooves of Port Townsend and Beyond water, and Island and clouds. It seemed to lean toward the view as if Enchanted. Although we later learned that had far more to do with neglect than magic. The once elegant slopes of its hipped roof rolled and curled green with moss. The tall straight walls at its Four Square design camouflaged and salmon pink asbestos shingles the windows covered in grimy curtains. Three discarded furnaces for neon yellow oil drums, an ancient camper shell and a pair of rusted wheel barrows. They scattered at odd angles across the overgrown grass. As if caught in a game of large appliance freeze tag. The yard was Darwinian in it's landscaping, an agglomeration of plants and trees stuck in the ground and left to survive in front to whether stunted palm trees flank the walkway, like a pair of tropical lawn jockeys gone lost, while a feral camellia bush should cover the porch and was headed for the front for the Second Story. Someone had hacked away a rough opening for the front stairs down which an assortment of rusted rakes and car mufflers and bags of fertilizer sprawled in lazy abandon. In their midst, seemingly oblivious to its setting set of rotting fruit basket gift cards, still attached, that one my husband said as he pointed to the house. It's not for sale, I noted. I know, but it should be. Don't you think? Our son and daughter 10 and 13 stared out the car window slack-jawed. You're kidding, right? The kids asked, but I think they already knew that the question was rhetorical. I'm now going to the little more philosophical part will end on the personal because that's always fun. And the first chapter is called Falling in Love and every chapter starts with a quote and this quote is buyers are liars and it's written by every real estate agent ever. When I was young, my mother used to take all five of her kids on annual quest for the family Christmas tree. We would travel around Los Angeles in our wood-paneled station wagon from one lot of precut Evergreens to another searching for the perfect tree. As the trip dragged on, there were times I questioned my mother's sanity and yet my mother found her tree, it created a satisfaction within her that I could see. Even if I didn't always understand. Maybe a particular height reminded her of being a child herself. Perhaps A Certain Shade of Green reached into her soul. I never really knew. And perhaps knowing was never the point. What I would ask what she was looking for. My mother would just smile and say it has to talk to me. Any honest, real estate. Agent will tell you that most homebuyers decisions are no more rational than my mother's with retrieve. There was a time in my life years after I first encountered that ramshackle house in Port

Townsend. When I was an agent myself, walking buyers through the process and dutifully helping them drop their lists of requirements. I would listen to a couple emphatically assert that they needed, four bedrooms two baths, and a no maintenance yard, and then watch as they fell in love with the tiny garden becalmed cottage that they spotted on the way to the house that met every one of their specifications. That happened over and over and over. While we may like to believe that our house needs are pragmatic line items, our true needs, the ones that drive our decisions come far more often from some deep and unacknowledged Wellspring of memories and desires. Because here's the thing we aren't looking for a house. We're looking for a home. A house can supply you with a place to sleep, to cook, to store your car. A home fits your soul. In ancient Rome, the term domos from which we get the word domicile, meant both people and place an unspoken relationship, that we feel like a heartbeat. A home fulfills needs you didn't know you had. So it is no wonder that when pressed for an explanation for our choices. We give reasons that make no sense, pointing to a bunch of dried lavender hanging in the kitchen, a porch swing, the blue of her front door. Almost always things, that could be recreated in a house that fits the list. But sense is not the point. These small details are simply visual indicators of an architectural personality that fits our own. That reminds us of a childhood home or house filled with color in the laughter of children that we visited once on a vacation in Mexico. And yet the choice of a home is not just about where we've been or what we remember. It's also about who we want to be. As Winston, Churchill famously said we shape our buildings and afterwards they shape us. When we choose a house. We are making a decision about how we will live. I don't mean any obvious way of how long your commute to work will be or whether there are schools or stores or friends nearby. Although all those things are important and will impact your life. What I am talking about is something far more subliminal. The designs of our homes, quite literally change us. An eating nook for two invites a busy couple to slow down every morning for coffee. A courtyard in an apartment building helps create community. A south-facing window encourages optimism, while alcoves foster book lovers. Perhaps one of the strongest blows for feminism came from the first Sledgehammer that opened a kitchen to a family room and change the view of the cook from both sides of the wall. It is the rare buyer who sees these things for what they are. We are understandably distracted by the stress of what is, for many of us, the biggest financial decision of our lives. Our minds are busy, but we feel those subtle calls. We see that bunch of lavender and as often as not, we leap. So we took a gigantic leap. This house was filled with seven and a half tons of trash. It was well, I'm going to read you a little bit about the inspection and it'll give you an idea. And one of the things I like to do throughout was to kind of make renovation and marriage and relationships all kind of work together. So this is toward the end up of the inspection. It has not gone that well, actually. And here we are. One of the reasons, by the way, that it has not gone that. Well, make sure it's because there was a very distinct lack of Maintenance occurring in the house. In an odd way, marriages deal with the same maintenance issues as houses. And sometimes here too, the romance of maintenance, is that it has none. Caretaking in a relationship is not flowers or date night. Necessary as these are they are the equivalent of a new color painted on your walls, delightful but not structural. Structural is a unloading, the dishwasher when it's your partner's turn; its learning about mushroom hunting or musical theater, because your spouse loves it. It's listening. It's talking about

the best of your partner in public, not the worst. It is listening to Stories we have heard a hundred times before as if they are new. Often it is just listening, period. My father always washed the car by hand before he took my mother out on a date even after they were married. He would say he wanted it clean for his girl. That is the part she remembered, not where they went, or what they did. As psychologist, John Gottman, who studied countless married couples will tell you, it is the presence of respect and an abiding willingness to support each other more than Romance, that indicates whether a marriage will last. As I followed Ben up the stairs in the Port Townsend house, I was hoping we were doing well in the marriage department. But I worry that sometimes we threw ourselves at things like this because the excitement of a questionable project seemed more romantic or at the very least more dramatic than the care taking of a relationship. It is perhaps why many marriages founder during a remodel or a building project. It isn't really about needing a new kitchen or a house. Sensing a lack in their relationship, some couples rushed toward a project. When in fact, those voids might be better filled by words spoken to each other by simple maintenance. Instead of a new addition. The jury was still out on where Ben and I fell on that Spectrum. The truth is though that many of the things I love best about Ben came out during our crazy projects, his gift of envisioning, what isn't there, his reliable sense of humor, his artistic sensibilities. Not to mention his macgyver-like abilities. On one of our first dates, a trip in the Los Angeles mountains. He fixed my car's leaking gas line. By re-chewing an old piece of gum. He'd found it in the ashtray and plugging the hole until we could get to a gas station. But the fact that I found this immensely appealing says much about both of us. Maybe probably, I worry too much. I told myself so I crossed my fingers and headed upstairs. The chaos we'd encountered on the main floor extended it to the second, a clawfoot bathtub, sat in the middle of the first bedroom filled to overflowing with what looked like 40 years of clothes and board games and sports equipment. We tried to enter the other bedrooms, but the doors would only open it enough for a peek inside. Peering in through a crack in the door. I saw more piles of clothes, a camping porta potty, a rifle. Oh, man. I heard the inspector say backing out of the bathroom. His voice muffled by the respirator he'd donned before entering. He came here and called me. You've got to see this. He pointed to the shower. It was the soap I saw first. A delicate sculpture made up of some 50 slivers of Irish Spring thin as porcelain, a precarious Tower of green and white rising up in the back corner, More work to stack them than to throw them away and yet there they were balanced. The faucet, Ben redirected my attention. I looked and then looked again, puzzled. The handles were covered with yellow, rubber kitchen gloves, secured, with rubber bands. They look like Mickey Mouse hands waving at me from the tile wall, but that didn't make any sense. I turned to Ben. So he wouldn't get electrocuted, he remarked drily. And then I realized the plumbing was live. There were a couple potential explanations for this situation. A rat could have chewed away the insulation of a wire that then came to rest on a pipe or and we were beginning to think. This was more likely, someone had grounded a live wire instead of a neutral one to a pipe as would normally happen. In any case, whoever was taking showers had preferred a risk of death rather than fix the problem. It was kind of impressive when you thought about it. Except there was already too much to think about of the 30 plus items on the inspector's check list the best, we could hope for was a neutral ranking on only a few. The only thing that would garner full praise in this house was the view and that didn't require the



house. Ben and I shared a look. Do you still want? He wasn't saying, no, send me something. I said to the house is my mind. Give me a reason because strangely enough. I still wanted one. The inspector had found an entrance to the attic. When it was my turn Ben held ladder and I climbed up the rungs expecting the worst. But as the beam from the flashlight roved over the darkened space, I could see the straight lines of Rafters, the untouched interior of a roof, soaring above me, everything felt quiet, peaceful, as if this one portion of the house had somehow kept itself separate from all that had happened below. as if in some way It was only itself. For that first time. I felt the house as it had once been. I leaned forward into that still perfect space of the attic. And in that moment, all the defects of the house mattered not at all. I went for the last item on the inspection list. Does it feel right? It's okay. I whispered into the dark. It's not your fault. We'll take care of you. Thank you.

00:56:38 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you. I'm still picturing the Irish Spring. That is incredible.

00:56:47 Erica Bauermeister

It haunts me to this day.

00:56:50 Peggy Sturdivant

Did you take photographs at all?

00:56:52 Erica Bauermeister

You know, we didn't as much as we should have because it was just so terrifying. I think i thought if we took pictures, it would be real and then we wouldn't do it.

00:57:01 Peggy Sturdivant

Then the nightmares wouldn't go away. Well everyone. Thank you so much for joining us here tonight. It's been a lovely, I think, you know, in a way that the theme is started to emerge is something you identified in the last section. Erica, which is, you know, and especially in a marriage or a relationship, the willingness to support one another. And that really that started with Mary Jean and came through Judith and your piece. So I love how they fit together. So what I would like to do now is I'm going to end the recording portion and allow anyone, you know, who wants to unmute and ask questions to go ahead and do so.

