



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #387

00:00:00 Peggy Sturdivant

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to reading number 387 of the It's About Time Writers Reading series. Delighted to have you all here. I know that Ann Batchelor Hursey is a long time "It's About Time" person. Lynn Miller at the Ballard branches able to sit in tonight because she is going to be your host and Emcee for the March reading. So she's getting a little sense of our, you know, she knew exactly what we were doing when we were in the room next door, and she could look at us, but not so much when we're hiding on Zoom. So welcome. We're going to be hearing from Ann Batchelor Hursey tonight, GG Silverman and from Judith Van Praag. So first of all, I would like to say that this series was founded by Esther Helfgott in 1990, and it's dedicated to the memory of Anna Helfgott, her mother, who began writing at age 70. And to the memory of Nelson Bentley, the quintessential teacher who gave Anna and scores of others help and hope. It's About Time is dedicated to an end of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, homelessness and war. I would also like to announce a sort of dedication tonight to the late Eleanor Owen DeVito. And for those of you who were here in December, Eleanor, at the time who was a mere hundred years old, shared an award-winning chapter from her Memoir. And despite the fact that we couldn't see her face part of the time it was brilliant. And something happened at the end. I forget if she lost a piece of paper or something. But the end was actually just brilliant, because she's sort of lifted her head to the screen and just brought that story home brilliantly. I was dismayed, but you know, perhaps not that shocked yesterday to see that she had died on February 6 and was delighted, though, to learn, and I'm going to show you a little screen image here, I was delighted to learn that, according to the obituary, she had been able to publish her Memoir before her death. There's also this works. Look at that that is Eleanor on her hundred and first birthday in January. So it said that her death came after a brief illness. So I am very glad that she was so vibrant as we were witness so close to the end of a remarkable life that was one also so closely dedicated to increasing awareness and resources for those with mental illness and their family members. So Bravo to Eleanor, I'm so glad we had her with us. I would now like to invite anyone to let me know in the chat or otherwise if they would like to do a three-minute open mic reading tonight. We already have two people on board. The open mics will be between the featured readers. Ann Batchelor Hursey's poems have appeared on Seattle buses in the Seattle Review, Raven Chronicles and Crab Creek Review, among others. Besides collaborating with a variety of artists, she has written poems to Compost Community Gardens and Fair Trade. Her chapbook, A Certain Hold, was published by Finishing Line Press 2014. I believe more than soon-to-be-released, but in hand is her hybrid collection field notes to Maya Lin's Confluence Project Landscapes. Hursey holds an MFA from Pacific Lutheran University's Rainier Writing Program. Please welcome Ann.

00:04:30 Ann Batchelor Hursey

Thank you Peggy. I have to say, when you have a book that comes out and it's all virtual... This is now my third virtual event around this book. So you're getting I think I'm past all the awkward things, but I'm still going to be awkward. I just am. So I just wanted to thank you for inviting me to the 387 virtual All About Time writers reading series. Once again, you told me it would be okay to, you know, say ya me, I've got this book out. You can buy it on my website, which is annhursey.com, and if you don't like PayPal, you can just send me a message, we'll work it out with a paper check. Anyway, the last event I was on, I almost forgot to say, oh yeah, I have a book to sell, but so I'm learning, I'm just learning. Now. I decided for fun, because I'm usually known for reading poetry that I would read this poem that I wrote to help ... the poem's called How It All Began. And it's really how this project All Began. So I'm going to read it and then jump into my prologue, choose one of the sections of my book, and then end on a recognition of all the tribes that are part of the Confluence Project collaboration. Poem one: How It All Began. Pike Place Market 2014. When I first saw her face carved into a black resin charm for sale on a necklace at Pike Place Market, I spoke her English name, She Who Watches and learned about coyote's question to her. Long ago, when animals could talk her Village sheltered, well fed and happy. He said, changes are going to happen. How will you watch over your people? She did not know. So old man coyote changed her into a silent face carved in a rock to watch over her people through wind and rain below her cliff. Tsagaglalal. Last of the women Chiefs, her large almond eyes watch her people high above Big River. Wishram, Wasco, Tenino, Cayuse, Umatilla, Yakima. She stares down winds that post against basaltic cliffs. She who watches no spears and hooks and nets, that harvest arching salmon. Her men catch salmon as women dry and trade this wealth with other tribes. I once believed those eyes could be any woman's eyes. Eyes that search for a child's return. Eyes that checkout back to close a door to thunder. Eyes that guide a hand to crack a window open, allow the lull of rain to enter, to tuck a blanket under, to stoke a fire to keep a family warm and dry. But I lie to you. This stone owl woman is not any woman, no arms, no legs. She cannot lift or hold or change the sound of rain. Tsagaglalal, She Who Watches, Last of the Women Chiefs. Her unblinking gaze protects her people forever.

00:08:18 Ann Batchelor Hursey

Now, to the rest of my prologue. Her real name, her Wishram name is Tsagaglalal. She's the largest Petroglyph in what today is called Columbia Hills State Park located on the Washington side of the Columbia River. And when I asked her who or what are you watching, I discovered she was looking across the river at Celilo Village. Her Village was known for its bounty of salmon during spring and autumn runs. It was the longest continually inhabited gathering place in North America. Tribes from up and down the river came here to barter, socialize, gamble and hold sacred ceremonies. When Lewis and Clark encountered this bustling village in 1805, they called it The Great Mart. And as I did more research I learned that in legend Tsagaglalal was last of the women chief of the Wishram Village of nixlúidix. No wonder I found her face so compelling. The Confluence Project. It began in 2002 as an opportunity for the river tribes to respond to the upcoming Lewis and Clark Bicentennial in 2005. The truth is that Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery didn't discover anything. They traveled hundreds of miles and visited and documented the people who were already living along the Great River. As a non-native woman, I have much to learn about the Columbia River's First Peoples.

Confluence provides a map. Maya Lin, along with an amazing group of tribal artists and Elders, created five completed art installations and started plans for a sixth. I visited all six sites along 438 miles of the Columbia and Snake River, also known as Nch'i-Wana, Big River. As I traveled those miles, I was surprised at how embedded, almost hidden the mile in art installations were in the river landscapes. Each art installation is informed by both restoration of the land and tribal traditions. These field notes chronicle this pilgrimage with the intention to encourage others to follow. Maya Lin, an American architectural designer and artist known for her award-winning 1982 Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC. She was the river tribes' first choice of artist and architect to help them tell their story. Lin accepted their invitation to collaborate and create art landscapes along the Columbia River and its tributaries. The river tribes believed Lin's art showed she understands individual sacrifice and the inherent power of the land. And one more added part of my prologue is my husband, David, and I comprised the we in my narrative. We traveled by car to each site across two years. And as a poet I thought about Basho, the Japanese haiku and heiban master, who traveled with his disciple Surah. When he wrote his famous Haiku Journey "Narrow Road to a Far Province" 1689. My field notes began to shape themselves into a similar haiban style of prose filled narratives with place names, directions, as well as Haiku... sometimes list poems I should add. They capture interior moments and gems of new vocabulary specific to the river tribes and the Inland Pacific Northwest. Because of the time limits. I was timing each of my sections and realize that the very last site along the river on the snake called The Listening Circle at Chief Timothy Park. It's just the right amount of time to read. So I will read the last section, sort of the last section of this book. Listening Circle at Chief Timothy Park, Clarkston, Washington. The site blessed by the Nez Perce spring 2005, and this ceremony inspired Maya Lin's design for the listening Circle. It was later dedicated 10 years later in 2015. Listening Circle, Thursday, August 23rd 2018. Temperatures in low 80s. Chief Timothy Park is an island on the Snake River off State Route 12 connected to the North Bank of the river by a short Bridge. The nearest town is Clarkston. Seven miles east. near Idaho's border. Lewiston, Idaho is one mile farther east, bordered by the Snake and Clearwater Rivers. These towns' names remind us of Lewis and Clark's passage through what were once thriving, Nez Perce homelands. Some traditions say, Chief Timothy of the Nez Perce was a child when Lewis and Clark traveled through to the coast and back again in 1805 and 1806. First poem. August summer heat. We traverse peaks and plateaus. East, where rivers meet. Unlike other Mile and Confluence installations, Chief Timothy Park is not on the way to anywhere. We plan accordingly and book two nights at one of the cabins. We take our time driving east of the Cascades, detour through the Hanford Reach National Monument and enjoy its austere and untrammelled landscape along the Columbia River. This detour adds an additional hour, making our road trip 7 hours. It is late summer and daytime temps hover in the 90s. The week before it was in the three digits. Our cabin has air conditioning for which we are grateful. Poem. Somewhere north of here wildfires burn, but drifting smoke settles on the river. Of all the Lin art installations this one most resembles the original landscape that Lewis and Clark encountered, stark basalt cliffs, prairie grasses, extremes in temperature near the Confluence of the snake and Clear Water Rivers. Here's an excerpt from Clark's Journal: "Worthy of remark that not one tick of Timber on the river near the forks, and but a few trees for a great distance up the river. October 10th, 1805." Once settled into our cabin, we enjoy the inherent slower pace as we stay two nights. The closest entrance to the Listening Circle is behind our cabin near the ADA access road. This road is relatively flat with a gentle rise as you approach the natural amphitheater at the top of the hill. The

other entrance to the Listening Circle begins at the farthest northwest parking lot and follows the Snake River on the south side of the island. The latter trail is twice as long and signs tell us that this is a rattlesnake area and to honor its reptilian inhabitants. Three joint Haiku. Insects jump and sail into the air between chirps of unseen birds, slight breeze cools us down, low stone benches, perfect to sit, listen, heed its timeless message of river, land and people, Nez Perce, Nimiipuu. At the Listening Circle I read the words Lin transcribed from the blessing ceremony. These instructions are carved into the lowest of the benches shaped in arcs. Three rows on one side, three on the other, like ripples on water. These long stone benches half faced North, half faced South. And this is what's written: Women sit facing north; men sit facing south; elders sit facing west, and no one is to walk behind them. The East is left open to greet the new day. I Orient myself to the Sun, and I find the bench that faces North, which means I sit on the south side of the circle. The Nez Perce blessing ceremony requires us to find our place among the four directions, and to sit silent and listen to what this place has to say. Poem. Below deep blue skies feel the pulse of this island's heartbeat thumping. Stay a while. Birds leave white punctuation marks a reminder to pause. Far off metallic sounds of a truck gearing up to slow down, then silence, and sometimes a chirping. Last poem. Sacred Circle. Each moment, a blessing. Listen. I am grateful for the time that I spent in Maya Lin's project Landscapes blessed and collaborated by the river tribes who are still here. My book includes all their websites, but I will list them right now. The Chinook Indian Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Confederated Tribes and bands of the Yakama Nation, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Nez Perce Tribe or Nimiipuu. And the very last two poems or two Haiku follows my very last site, which is, when I talk about whose homelands do I call home, I will not be reading that. But I do end with Listen Deeply. Listen deeply to the river, learn from the land and its people, sit in silence and ask the river to teach us and show us the way. And those last two lines are from the Chinook blessing that was said at Cape Disappointment during that ceremony. And once again, you can read all about it. You can. And there's even extra pages in here for you to add your own Haiku, your own notes about the weather and what you what you experience there. And I've just today I found a great piece of news. Also with my book. I have a friend named Luke [last name inaudible] who's an artist, and she's created. It's called field notes companion. So she is an artist book that goes with my chapbook, and it's going to be on display at the Miller library. That's at the UW at the Center for Urban Horticulture between March 3rd and 31st. So yeah, you can't have enough of collaborations with other artists. And thank you for listening. I didn't time myself, but I tried to beforehand. I don't think I went over.

00:20:37 Peggy Sturdivant

I was not watching the time, it was way too much to listen to. And that's how I found myself wanting to see some of this. So what a wonderful bonus to have a collaboration with an artist to be able to see it. So

00:20:54 Ann Batchelor Hursey

And if you go to the Confluence project website, you can see it all. They've got wonderful photos. And I was in one of their recent introduction to Confluence where there's a slide show. And the director, any features met at the very end. So you can see some of the wonderful pictures of what's there. But

you really just have to go there and, and don't rush through it. I hear some guy tried to do all four and 38 miles in a weekend. I would not do that. You know,

00:21:30 Peggy Sturdivant

You prefer two years with your disciple.

00:21:33 Ann Batchelor Hursey

That's right. It's so funny. He's not really my disciple. But this is when I, when I told him at the end, my gratitude page is two pages. But I did say, and to David Bond Hursey my companion on every road trip. The one who knows how to be both nearby and far away with whom I am never lost.

00:21:59 Peggy Sturdivant

Lovely. Thank you. Thank you both for making that journey and for sharing it tonight. I'd now like to introduce Carol Levin, who is going to be doing an open mic tonight. So Carol,

00:22:16 Carol Levin

This poem that I'm reading is... has short separate sections. And each of these are designated by kind of a heading, a date. And there's also two quotes in it, and I'll try and gesture so you'll know when they are. Reviving Denise Levertov, and there's a little sort of epigraph, Denise Levertov 1923 to 1997. October 24 1997. As always I studied that little space between your teeth as you read aloud, each word translucent. I scrutinized surprises in your lines, sound of England in your voice, black eyes that keep infirmity. Your secret. Today is your birthday. None of us know. Looking back, I close my eyes a long time. If I read faster, listen harder, might I have detained you? December 20th 1997. The nurse tiptoed as they read you, your poems and some Psalms that you loved. Your son, who you thought might die before you, leaned in for good goodbye. An hour later, he survived beyond your unthinkable death. You passed just before the darkest day, leaving an asterisk when the sun crossed the celestial equator, and the cycle of light began anew. December 27th 1997. Yesterday, lay on the ground and fog your Mount Rainier, always loftier, lonelier than I ever remember. Your Seward Park spruce, firs, flowering cherry and black poplars with gray and furrowed bark look dazed. We were stymied on the road to the church. Every corner a light turned red, a bridge lifted to block our path. In a poem, you ask, how do you grasp it? How does it not slip away? In spite of yellow lilies your casket protruded ugly on the middle rack above the hollow that would embrace it. A white cassocked priest wearing a brown Eddie Bauer jacket led us in the Catholic Rite of middle. We stood mute in dank light, impaled by cold, when abruptly, he sent us away. We each carried a kiss on our fingers to the box that remained unmoved. No date. I know gravity was taken by surprise whenever they settled you in. I trust that for you, this final gesture was precious for its privacy. Addendum February 1st, 1998. A pride of poets left us lessons. So many died that year. Matthews, [inaudible], Laughlin and you. Now you will never teach me tea or poems your way again. So many, those of us who loved you stream into the steamy room, metal folding chairs squeak from the platform. Friends and students speak your poems their poems, their stories of you. Violating fire codes, people on the stairs press against each other along the wall, swallowing tears and laughing. Every moment recounted. Then a lanky poet with black curly hair gestures to the exact chair in the back row on the left side of the room, where he saw you last. All eyes turn bodies twist, look back a tug-of-war with gravitational pull. Shall I change the...

00:28:34 Peggy Sturdivant

Well that was, that was actually a seven-minute poem. So perhaps if there's time, you know, come back around later, but that was beautiful. Brought back so many memories, I think I saw Denise Levertov, but one time, what an honor. Let us now go, we'll do our next Open Mic after our reading by GG Silverman. So, I always love welcoming people who are new. I'm not sure how GG found us, but I love that more and more people are finding us. And so welcome. Please. Our first time reader GG Silverman.

00:29:18 GG Silverman

Thank you. Peggy. I found you on a Seattle writers and readers Network.

00:29:24 Peggy Sturdivant

Good. Good. Everybody once in a while. I, you know, especially when I like to book people all and big spurts so that I'll have a couple months under my belt. And so glad you found us.

00:29:37 GG Silverman

And I was very happy to meet Eleanor for, however briefly long, I knew her. I emailed her a few weeks... no two months before she died after I met her at your last reading. And I gave her a link on how to self publish her book very easily. And when you told me that she'd actually published her book like two weeks before she died, I was like, and I bought a copy. I'm so thrilled. I'm sad she's gone. But I'm glad I got to know her for a brief.

00:30:06 Peggy Sturdivant

It wasn't what I expected to be called. So you'll have to put that, if you will, after you're done reading in the chat, because I need to get my own copy. So

00:30:14 GG Silverman

yeah, I will find it for you. Thank you so much for having me tonight. And thank you to who's ever read so far. And I see some friends here, Kirsty, Rosie, Natasha. Thank you all for coming.

00:30:28 Peggy Sturdivant

Let me introduce you.

00:30:30 GG Silverman

Oh yeah. Ooh, ooh, sorry. Yeah,

00:30:33 Peggy Sturdivant

She's so excited! GG Silverman is an author of speculative and literary short fiction and poetry who lives just north of Seattle. She is also disabled, and the daughter of immigrants. Her short fiction has appeared in the Bram Stoker Award nominated "Women in Horror Anthology." Not All Monsters from Strange House books and was a finalist for the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Award for feminist writing, among other honors. Her work has also appeared in Psychopomp, Speculative City, Courted

Queen, So To Speak, The Iron Horse Literary Review, the Seventh Wave, Molotov Cocktail and more. Her short story "I'm sorry. I tried. I love you" was optioned by writer-director Goldie Jones for short film adaptation, which completed production in November of 2021 and is now under consideration at several film festivals, which will have to keep us apprised of. Welcome Gigi.

00:31:31 GG Silverman

Thank you tonight's story. I'm reading from a piece that was recently published. It is called The Corpse Carriers. It is a magical realism piece that attempts to show, in an embodied fashion, the extra emotional labor that is often forced onto women. And it was written last summer during a time of, as we all remember, the horrifying legislation that was taking control away from women over their bodies. And so without further ado, The Corpse Carriers. All the girls in our town are assigned a corpse to carry once they're old enough. It stays with you nearly forever, slung around your neck, or held in your arms, or somehow fastened to your body if you're clever enough or lucky enough to get help to do so, Boys don't get corpses. They walk around unburdened, free to do whatever they want. You're lucky, we girls are told when we're young, to so intimately know the meaning of life, to stare death in the face, to deeply understand sacrifice. You'll see this corpse will make you better. Your corpse is with you all the time, at breakfast, at school, at the mall. You only get a break when you're almost one yourself. That is, when you're very old. Those women, the retirees, are called future Corpses. My mother still carries her assignment, but my grandmother's tour of duty is done. My dad claps grams on the back. "You are free," he says. Some grandmothers party when they're finished, whooping and hollering, but not mine. My grandmother doesn't smile, never has. She is stooped and bent from years of carrying the dead, has a glazed look in her eye. "I'm tired," she moans from her easy chair. She doesn't even wear her Blue Ribbon, her sole reward for decades of service. All she wants is to rest. We flick on the TV for her, and she watches, dazed. She is now a future corpse. Mom tells me, "Never mind your grandmother." She pops a pill surreptitiously than smiles, reaching for the vacuum with one hand, while adjusting her corpse with the other. She trips, smashes her knee on the corner of the coffee table, yelping in pain. I look up for my homework. My brother passes through the living room, headphones on, not noticing that my mother has taken a spill as he heads out the door. "I'm okay," Mom winces out. "Nobody run over. I'll be fine. Really," she curses under her breath, readjusting her corpse, which has tumbled awkwardly to the wrong side of her body. She continues vacuuming. She left her job ages ago because juggling everything was too much. She still carries a business card, though. One that says, Justine R Helms: Career Mom and Corpse Carrier. Ask me about my great kids, Lana and Jason. I scribble a note in the journal I keep tucked in my 3-ring binder, recording thoughts at a moment's notice. To be a corpse carrier, is that all there is? At school after the latest corpse assigning ceremony, my bestie, Trina, and I watch the older girls attempt to carry on with their newly assigned cadavers. Most of the corpses are bigger than they are, trailing awkwardly behind them. Some of the girls gather in the halls like they used to, attempting to flirt with boys. "Show me yours," a boy says to one of the girls. "Okay," she chirped, snapping her gum. She produces her assignment certificate points out features. Trina rolls her eyes, muttering "Some girls do anything to get a boy's attention." "Mine's a 65 year old male," the girl intones, breathless. "He died of natural causes." The boy shrugs. "Is yours preserved?" The girl nods, "Yeah, I got lucky." "The truth is," Trina hisses, "her mommy and daddy paid extra for that." I scan the hallway. I noticed the girls from down-and-out families; their corpses aren't preserved and will start to stink

soon. They will likely drop out of school, get menial jobs where no one minds your stench. Other girls seem to walk smaller, like their corpses are dragging them down. "Our corpses are a gift," a girl in tight yoga pants raves to a friend. "We are sooo lucky to have this form of enlightenment. I mean, boys don't know what they're missing." Her shirt has a cartoon dog on it with the Mantra nama-stay. Her corpse is blond, thin, lithe and fastened to her body piggyback style. Obviously, with some help. "Let's go to class," Trina says, "and leave these hosers behind." In biology I make a note in my journal when the teacher isn't looking. Only one year left till my corpse assignment. Is that what I really want? Do I even have a choice? In the few remaining weeks of school I noticed that most of the girls with new corpses are quieter. Only a brave few carry on as if nothing has changed, making out with boys in the hall with a dead body slung over their shoulder. "Gross," Trina growls as we pass one such couple. I have to agree. On our walk home I'm distracted as Trina carries on about the injustices of being female. But my mind's on logistics and spatial conundrums. How does one have sex while carrying a corpse? I mean, I imagine it can be done. It must be done all the time. If not how our children ever be born? How would I have ever come into this world? But I wonder if there are unspoken and social socially sanctioned cheats like: it's okay for women to put down their corpses for a hot minute just so they can fuck. I imagine my own parents. My mother's soft white body under my dad's. My mom's assigned cadaver resting beside her in their king-sized bed as my parents grunt and moan. I shudder, wishing I'd chosen another image. The next day at school, Trina points out something I hadn't noticed before. "All our teachers are men," she says. "There are no role models for us, at least not here. How are we supposed to know how to be strong women if no one's modeling how to go through life with your corpse?" The girl is right. So right. And her life isn't fair. Her mom disappeared one day when Trina was a toddler, and her grandmother died young. Trina had no one, only her dad. At least I have my mom and my grandmother. The Grams, a future corpse, has checked out and is only waiting for the end. "You should come over more and hang out with my mom. She's strong," I offer. Trina doesn't seem convinced. After school, we go to Trina's house and watch television when we're done with our homework. None of the women on TV carry corpses. And we begin to wonder what's real. We look it up on the internet. It appears that corpse carrying is a regional custom turned into law, something only we local women do or are forced to. "If we leave this town," Trina says, "we can break the cycle. We can be whoever or whatever we want. Without those awful things literally hanging around our necks." Together we dream about our futures. Trina wants to go to Art School, move to the big city and be a painter, a famous one. My dreams aren't as exciting or flashy. I think about my talents, and they are quiet ones, research and writing. "But still," Trina says. "So what if your dream is to live a quiet life? You should be able to do that without hauling around a corpse your whole life for fuck's sake." "Plus," I tell her, "it would get in the way of, well, you know." Trina nods knowingly. "Yeah, girl preach." We imagine our future boyfriend's or maybe girlfriends, and think about how beautiful our lives together could be. If we weren't carrying corpses, I close my eyes and dream about the perfect boy imagining what it would be like to kiss him. How warm and soft and sweet. "Promise me one thing, girl," Trina says, resting her curly head on my shoulder. "That no matter where life takes us, somehow we'll stay friends till the end." I envision us old and white-haired, sitting in side-by-side rocking chairs after both our spouses have died, watching the ocean and peace at the last of our living days. After we've had the lives we've always dreamed of. Trina, the world-renowned artist and me, a best-selling novelist. That night I make a note in my journal. Future plans run away with Trina. Over the summer, things get weird. The news blares that more and more towns

and states have passed laws requiring that young women are assigned a corpse. "We have to get out of here [inaudible]," Trina says. "Run away with me. We have to get somewhere safe as far away as possible before this thing spreads like a disease." I nod. Running away was only ever a fantasy. What did I really know about living on my own? I had no job and didn't know if I could get one at least one that could pay for an apartment. "We'll figure it out," Trina says. "We could crash at my cousin's out-of-state. He'd okay with that. We could waitress in his restaurant, get tips." I asked her for some time to think, to prepare. "Tick-Tock, " she says, "we're not getting any younger." At home mom seems different, like the smiles are fewer and far between. Her face seems more worn, ravaged by worry and struggle. I tried to cheer her up, gifting ideas like buoyant balloons. "Mom, Trina needs a role model, someone who can show her how to be strong and live a satisfying life while carrying a corpse." Mom finally smiles, but it's a bitter one. "I don't think I'm up for that honey." "But Mom, Trina's thinking about running away." She doesn't answer only pours herself a glass of wine, and goes back to stir frying vegetables, steam glistening on her forehead as her corpse appears to sleep peacefully on her shoulder. I don't tell her that Trina wants me to come, and that there's part of me that wants to go. But there's a part of me that can't leave the others behind, least of all my mother. If she can be strong and live, her whole life carrying a corpse. Why can't I? Weeks later, Trina and I fight. She tells me that I'm weak and calls me a baby, and that I'll regret it forever if I don't come. She leaves that night on a bus. I tear up my journal, burying it in a hole in the yard with my dreams. I never see Trina again. The next year at school, I'm dreadfully lonely. I throw myself into writing weird stories, though I have no one to share them with. And I neglect my homework. First semester, I managed to get C's across the board. Not bad enough to cause my family heartbreak, but not great enough to ensure the college scholarship and a scintillating career. As corpse assigning ceremony approaches, there's an epidemic of broken arms, broken legs and broken spines. Girls hurting themselves to get out of corpse carrying. But that doesn't relieve their duty, the law says. Only decrepit old age does or death. Then there's a flood of disappearances of girls in my grade, a rash of runaways. Then, finally, the suicides. Our town is ripped apart. At candlelight light vigils, mothers carrying corpses scream at each other. We carried corpses all our lives somehow, and we never once complained. The others scream back what we wouldn't give to relieve ourselves of this burden. I'm going to end there. Thank you so much.

00:45:34 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you so much, GG. Everybody make sure that you see in chat where Judith is very helpfully been posting, you know, people's websites so that you can see more of her work and find the story online. Thank you, GG. I'm so glad that you found us on Seattle writers, and you must come back again. Sylvia, if you would please unmute and prepare for your Open Mic.

00:46:09 Sylvia

This is a new piece, another Leticia poem, and it's called probably appropriately, after what we just heard, What To Do With The Leftovers. Leticia understands she will leave some things behind, A pile of glistening bones, big and little, a liver, two lungs, two eyes, a long and sometimes problematic digestive tract, assorted sweetbreads. Then there's all those fluids, blood, lymph, vitrious, synovium. Someone will have to clean it up. In her will she specified cremation, purification by fire. But she can't stop thinking about the midnight house fire when she was almost five. It burned everything. The

house, her clothes, all her toys, dolls, books, gone. Fire destroys, fire killed millions of Jews, Gypsies, queers. There's a stench to the idea of ovens. Leticia is considering changing her will. Perhaps she'll go with liquification. Everything, all her bones, teeth and organs dissolved, ready to pour down the drain. But she's not a swimmer. Never been completely comfortable in the water. Somehow doesn't cotton to the notion of being hydrolyzed. She is attracted to the newfangled, old-fashioned practice of decomposition, her body recycled into Earth. Leticia rather likes that idea of having her gut microbiome, which she carried all over the world, picking up a few things along the way. Think India, China, Russia, Peru, etc. Them doing one last job for her, no longer making vitamins and serotonin, and the many other things our gut Flora have done to keep her alive and flourishing, but digesting her breaking her down to garden soil so she can support new life. A kind of resurrection, lifting fresh green shoots into the sun.

00:48:31 Sylvia

I'm sure that Ann appreciated that, having written about compost herself. Thank you so much, Sylvia for channeling, Leticia and Leticia for letting Sylvia channel you tonight. It's a delight to have her back, although Mr. Zeitgeist last month was unexpected and delightful surprise, if I'm a sort of say. So, okay, I would now like to introduce Judith Van Praag.

00:49:07 Judith Van Praag

Hello, Peggy. Hello listeners.

00:49:11 Peggy Sturdivant

There you go. So I last got to pleasure of, you know, seeing Judith in person in the Ballard Library. So I'm delighted she's able to join us in our new, we hope, temporary format tonight. So writer-artist performer, Judith Van Praag is a second generation Holocaust Survivor from the Netherlands. She enjoys painting pictures with words and colors. Before her immigration to the US in 1994, Judith worked as a theater designer for primarily immigrant theater. As arts and lit writer at the International Examiner, she covered the Asian American community in Seattle. She is the author of Creative Acts of Healing After a Baby Dies. After a hiatus, she has returned to her works in process and hopes to finish another book before too long. Welcome Judith.

00:50:07 Judith Van Praag

Thank you. So much Peggy, I'm delighted to be here for the three hundred and eighty seventh It's About Time. Absolutely. I'll be reading tonight. Men In Suits, a section from my Memoir in process, educating shooting. This takes place in the Netherlands. Men In Suits. The visitors park on the sloped shoulder in front of the house. The grade is steep, and the passenger practically falls out of the car into the dry ditch. The man is skinny, and he wears a grey suit. It catches himself in an awkward pirouette like Jiminy Cricket. I recognized the driver in his blazer and gray slacks. He's the councilmember papa and I visited in Town Hall in Lake. Before Mama let's them in, I hide under the drop leaf table in the corner of the salon. I can see through the weave of the runner, but nobody can see me. I've tried that out. It's good to have a hiding place. So you can keep an eye on things. The spot has gotten tighter since the last time I hid. The gentleman introduce themselves to Mama in the kitchen. I can hear their names. Papa leads them into the salon. They stand around. Looking.

Everyone who comes to our home for the first time does that. They move sides when Mama enters with a tea tray. "Sugar, milk or lemon." She places the cups and saucers on the tablecloth. They both want sugar. No milk. "A slice of lemon is nice," Mr. Cricket says. Mr. Councilman wipes his face with a handkerchief. "About our plan...," he says. "Take a seat," Papa pulls a chair from under the round table. The tablecloth Mama inherited from her mother drops to the floor like a heavy wool skirt. The fabric makes my legs itch when we have dinner in the salon. I always make sure that the damask Mama puts on table for Shabbat covers my legs. So I don't feel that itch. Mr. Cricket unbuttons his gray suit coat, sits and pulls up his pant legs. Black hair, like spider legs, crawls on the white skin above his black socks. I stifled a giggle. Mr. Councilman turns his head. Did he hear me? He as well unbuttons his coat. His white shirt looks tight around his stomach. Plants his hands on the back of another chair. "You're looking for an advanced school for your brainy daughter, aren't you?" Brainy daughter, that's me. Brainy me. Maybe I'll be like Madame Curie. Papa said I could. Well, we watched that movie the other day. No, that was at night. Hmm, not really supposed to. They say. Papa standing on the threshold hands gripped doorframe. He's all smiles. He's showing his teeth. He likes that I'm called brainy. Mr. Cricket takes a sip. I see his Adam's apple move on his bony neck. "What if your girl skips six grade? She can start the bridging class after summer vacation." "How's that possible?" Mama shakes her head. I can't see her face, but she sounds cross. "She'll miss everything that's taught in sixth grade. How's she supposed to catch up? What she needs is a more advanced elementary school. Not skipping a whole year." "Shut up. Do," Papa says. Mama shrugs. Mr. Councilman paces the floor. "As I explained to you at the office, we're proud that Lake has one of the four experimental mammoth law schools in the country. The coming year is the last of the three experimental years. The year after will be the first official bridging class in the whole country. From the old system to the new. Other schools won't start with the mammoth law until the year after that. Now, the required number of attendance for the public school has been reached. We only need one more pupil for the Christian chapter. We lack one student to make it happen. What do you say? May we count on you, Mr. Van Praag? Ma'am?" "I beg your pardon," Mama says. Papa turns his head to face her. "Sorry, Jaap." Mama's figures flutter like wings in front of her chest. This is new. Mama never talks back at Papa. "I beg your pardon, gentlemen. Jaap? Am I hearing correctly that you want our daughter to attend a Christian School?" Mama shakes her head. "I thought you were here to talk about an alternative for the Village School. What is this about a Jewish girl attending a Christian School? I'm sorry, that makes no sense at all." Papa turns to the gentleman. "My wife doesn't understand." "I do understand!" "Hush, Doh!" Papa stares at her. I know he can stop words that way. He turns to the gentleman. "Can you explain again about the privilege of attending this Mammoth school?" I don't know about a Mammoth school. Skipping sixth grade, that could be scary. A charter school? Leaving school away from Alteveer? No more pestering. I'm Ready! "The school in Lake is the most advanced in the country. A test case, a charter school, if you will, the mammoth program still has to be introduced. I'll swear." Mr. Cricket scrapes his throat. "Your daughter will be learning French, German and English in the language lab, with recorders and headphones." "You hear that, Doh?" "What about mathematics, calculus, Etc.?" Mama says. "We teach modern algebra." Mr. Cricket takes a sip of his tea. "How will she learn what's taught in sixth grade? She'll..." Mr. Councilman interrupts Mr. Cricket. "That's a matter of tutoring. All in due time. We're ready to start. The public school has sufficient pupils signed up. The Christian School needs one more." Mr. Councilman points at Mr. Cricket. "This gentleman is the principle of the Christian School." "Why can't

Judy be enrolled in public school?" Mama says. "We need one more pupil," Mr. Cricket says. The councilman purses his lip as though he's going to whistle. A "v" Line appears between Mama's eyes. The corners of her mouth are turned down. Papa says she's cute when she's angry. She's not pretty when she frowns. "Obviously, your daughter is way ahead of the children in the school at Alteveer," Mr. Councilman says. Papa and Mama both nod. That's something they can agree on. Uncle Saunder told them they never had to be concerned about me. Judy is smarter than the two of you together he said. "You've home schooled her, haven't you?" Homeschooled? I've always gone to school. Maybe that's what Papa does when we look at books about the war together. Concentration camps. Mama raises her eyebrows. Papa shakes his head. "Yes. Yes, no. My aim has been to teach you as much as possible. I tutor her about this and that. These Village schools are a little behind." "Yes, of course, we understand. That's why the mammoth program is perfect for your daughter," Mr. Councilman says. "I'm all for it," Papa says. "But Jaap, she'll miss everything that's taught in sixth grade, another year of childhood!" "Nonsense. If she needs to learn anything extra, I'll help her. No problem." Mr. Councilman checks his watch.

01:00:50 Judith Van Praag

He puts on his jacket. "So we can count on you?" "Of course," papa says, "it's an honor to have our daughter be part of the experimental Mammoth program. I really like the idea." "Jaap, you don't even know the material that's taught in sixth grade!" Mama is mad. "Hush, Doh!" "Your daughter is brainy isn't she? She'll catch up quick enough. And if there's any problem, we'll find a solution. We can always find a tutor." Mr. Cricket gets up places to chair back under the table. "Brainy," Papa repeats the word and smiles. He obviously likes hearing that. Mr. Councilman shakes hands with Papa and Mama. "Let me know what you decide. Nice paintings. Yours?" "No, the cow isn't Papa's. The others are Mondrian's, but nobody's supposed to know that. The Madonna with child is my husband's." Mama steps toward my hiding place. Mr. Crickets feet get too close to me for comfort. "Madonna with child. Yours will be most welcome at our school, mon frau. His feet move away and so do mamas. Why welcome me because of the Madonna? I don't know brainy. If there's a school where children aren't put down for finishing problems fast. If that school has a big library, I'll be happy to go. Maybe the mammoth school in Lake is like that. Right now what I want is come out of my hiding place. My left leg is falling asleep. Ow! pins and needles. I'm getting out now. " A Christian school," Papa says from the kitchen. "If my daughter is going to attend a Christian School, I have to insist for her to be off on Saturdays and on Jewish holidays." Lying on the floor between my hiding place and the round table, I squeezed my leg hard. Mr. Cricket, he scrapes his throat again. I can hear the clock tick. "Well, there's nothing much going on on Saturdays. I don't think that should be a problem. And Jewish holidays, we'll book a sick day. That's easier for the administration." "Do the children sing in class?" Mama loves singing. I'm going to sing too if I can't keep my leg out. "Well, yes, every day starts with Psalms," Mr. Cricket says. "A Jewish girl shouldn't have to sing Christian songs," Papa says. Pins and needles, pins and needles, ooh needles. Mr councilman takes a step back into the salon. "Great sculpture, true family man, protecting his wife and children is that your husband's too?" "Uh-huh," Mama says. "If you don't want her to partake, I would be all right," Mr. Cricket says. "I don't like this arrangement." Mama steps back in the kitchen. "Shut up, Doh. Your opinion is of no importance," Papa says. "Our daughter's future is at a mammoth school." And thus I skipped sixth grade and start Junior High the Christian version of the mammoth program after the summer vacation.

01:04:35 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you so much for sharing part of your Memoir with us, Judith. So now we are going to hear from a former Seattle person who are welcomed back with open arms. Natasha, if you would like to unmute. So we can welcome you to our Open Mic tonight.

01:04:55 Natasha

Hi thank you. I have heard all of you read before, and it's lovely to hear you again, except for Judith. And I wanted to tell you this, Judith. My mother's from Rotterdam. So yeah, and my Oppa was part of the resistance. And so there's a lot of connection there. I write about my roots, but I that's not the poem I'm sharing tonight. So I used to write a lot of poetry. I've pretty much moved over to essays, but I thought I would read a small poem tonight. Sort of looking toward Valentine's. This is the only poem I think, that could be considered a love poem because it's fiction. Letter to a lover whose name spells darkbird. Look, when you call bring the basket, the one I lent you last winter. Please forget the strawberries. This summer left them parched, freezing thawing, only make strawberry soup. Pluck the crocosmia by the kitchen window. Its body reminds me of Tango. The year we spent a lifetime sailing in the boat of our bed. Our bed, a single mattress on mahogany. And when you slice flower from stem, do not harm yourself. An unremarkable red leaves the stem corrupted. Meet me, and we will share something with lime Maraschino. Consider the freshwater how we once became it. Our limbs liquid, our eyes opening like lilies. Meet me and we will forget our bodies were ever anything but a little salt water, waiting to be stirred. Thank you.

01:06:49 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you for giving us something to really segue into that strange day known as Valentine's Day. Last call in case there's anybody who wanted to open mic tonight. Calling once going twice. So I would like to extend a very happy 31st anniversary to our writing friends at the African-American Writers Alliance. They began in 1991 a mere year after It's About Time in 1990. And they are thriving. They also do a program through the Seattle Public Library System at the Columbia branch called Writer's Read. And they will be reading this coming Sunday. So they are just they all have their annual reading through Elliott Bay books and other things. So do we have an open mic person? Who's? Are you saying hello?

01:07:54 Don Krieger

Hi Peggy. It's Don Krieger. Hi, I brought up an audio of a poem by Denise Levertov, which I thought, might suit, it's African-American month. And it's a wonderful poem titled the day the audience walked out on me and why? And many of you may know it. This is a lovely recording. It's about five minutes, just short of five minutes. If that's okay, if you'll allow me to share screen, I can play it for you.

01:08:31 Peggy Sturdivant

Is it something I, as long as we feel that we have like are legally able to do. So? I don't know.

01:08:39 Don Krieger

Yeah, it's online.

01:08:41 Peggy Sturdivant

Okay. All right. Okay, I think we have the time, and we will close out with that. While you're looking for that next month, we will be hearing from Anna Kim, Benjamin Schmidt and Katerina Canyon.

01:08:56 Don Krieger

Here we go. I was a student of Denise's in the 60s. It was. It was really wonderful to hear.

01:09:10 Denise Levertov (recording)

I like to feel that having been writing all my life, I have written a lot of different kinds of poems. I like to feel free to have a certain range, and I'm going to read next a rather different kind of poem. I don't feel that poems my poems anyway fall into really marked off categories. They don't feel to me as if they do. They seem to me to come out of the same sources and to be written initially, because I need to write them. And part of my need to write, because I have always been interested in the art of poetry, is the need to to make things which can stand free of me when made. But the same needs to define my own, to discover what I what I feel by saying it, and to make things can produce at different times for different styles of poetry. And this one I think you'll agree is rather different from what I just read. It's one of a number of poems which have dates attached to them really, as parts of, of their titles. This one is called The Day the Audience Walked Out On Me and Why. And it's dated May 8, 1970, Goucher College, Maryland, which was the day before one of the big Washington demonstrations. Like this it happened after the antiphonal reading from the Psalms and the dance of lamentation before the Altar. And the two poems Life at War and What Were They Like? I began my rap and said, Yes, it is well that we have gathered in this Chapel to remember the students shot at Kent State. But let us be sure we know our gathering is a mockery unless we remember also the black students shot at Orangeburg two years ago and Fred Hampton murdered in his bed by the police only months ago. And while I spoke, the people, girls, older women, a few men, began to rise and turn their backs to the altar and leave. And I went on and said, yes, it is well that we remember all of these, but let us be sure we know it is hypocrisy to think of them unless we make our actions their memorial, actions of militant resistance. By then the pews were almost empty, and I returned to my seat, and a man stood up in the back of the quiet Chapel, near the wide open doors through which the green of May showed, and the long shadows of late afternoon and said my words desecrated a holy place. And a few days later, when some more students, black, were shot at Jackson, Mississippi, noone desecrated the white folks Chapel, because no memorial service was held.

01:13:54 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you, John. Thank you for sharing that. All right. Well, this has been a lovely evening that I'm so glad was able to happen. So I'm happy that we did the what the power outage was not more widespread, and that we were able to be together here tonight.