



# Library podcast

## Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #390

### 00:00:00 Peggy

Welcome live to you tonight from Topsfield, Massachusetts in the North Shore, to reading 390 of the It's About Time Writers Reading Series. Tonight, I'm happy to welcome Ann Spiers, Nicolas (Denny) Stern and Kathryn Thurber-Smith. We have at least one person already on the open mic. Our special guest tonight is my mother's beloved cat, Pippie, the prima donna. Let's see. The recording will be available on YouTube in a few days, and this reading tonight will also be a podcast that will be available on The Seattle Public Library website. I haven't been tracking on the turnaround time on the podcast, but because the librarian who assists on the editing is currently in Singapore, we've discovered that we have a really good thing going where I send it right away in Singapore time. She pretty much has it edited and within 24 hours, you can be sharing this reading with all of your friends on the It's About Time YouTube. So welcome, everyone. It's a beautiful evening warm here. I understand that it's horrific in the Pacific Northwest. So my sympathies. Our first reader tonight is Anne Spears, and I think she has earned the reference to being a longtime friend of It's About Time, and it's a pleasure to welcome her back for what is not even her first Zoom reading with us. Ann Spiers lives on Vashon Island where she was its inaugural Poet Laureate and won First Place in Mukai Farm and Garden's 2021 haiku competition. Her chapbook Harpoon (Ravenna, Triple Series, 2022) joins her two 2021 poetry books, Back Cut (Black Heron) and Rain Violent (Empty Bowl). Welcome, Anne.

### 00:02:23 Anne

Thank you so much. And I'm glad to be here, even if it is on Zoom and I can't go down a few doors and have some Japanese food at that restaurant and look around Ballard.

### 00:02:36 Peggy

They closed kind of early.

### 00:02:38 Anne

Yeah, well, there's COVID. So thank you, Peggy, very much. And before I am going to read from "Harpoon," which is in this trilogy, three chapbooks from Ravenna Press edited by Katherine Rantala. I'm going to read that in a minute, but because we have a guest from Korea, Beau Frank, I want to show you his work. My first book this year was called "Rain Violence," and he took the international weather symbols used since the 1790s to illustrate my quatrains on climate change. So Beau, he's over there in the mask because in Korea they wear masks. Good to see you Beau. Now I'm going to

read from "Triple Number 16." It's a series that Ravena Press has put out for many years. And I'm going to read from a chapbook called "Harpoon." Read parts of it. And first I want to thank Esther Healthcott, because a whole line of readers over the years, she was the last one to read it for me and give me some suggestions. First, she didn't know a lot of the Northwest whaling and fishing and that type of illusions, and she hated the title. She didn't hate the title. She wouldn't do that to me. She suggested I find some title that would let people know it's not about eating tongues, but it is partly about whaling in Baja. So these are poems that I wrote after going down to Baja to go to the birthing lagoons for the gray whales. And I had my grandfather in mind, and I also had in mind that I was in someone else's culture trying to use someone else's tongue. And so that's how the two themes go. So my dedication is: "Wake me when the tide turns. To my grandfather- Captain, Master and Harpooner. S.S. Westport, Bay City Whaling Station, Grace Harbor, Washington 1924." And these are in different parts, but I'm not going to go one, two, three. "The whaler sliced into the leviathan's gray side. Four cuts into the blubber, then flesh the layers back and chuck them into the tripods. These chunks of fat, called bibles, were sized for easy handling, sliced thinly as if leaves of a book empty of words. In Baja, I learned to fan my money on the counter and with the left hand hold a palm full of coins. Take what I owe you, take what you need. What I say to the woman at the roadside stands is [speaks in Spanish]. What I want to say is I know all Western movies end badly for Indians. She answers si, but gives me tacos filled with lengua beets red and crumbled queso. Perhaps, she thinks, this is what I need. At San Ignacio, the man sweeps the inn's courtyard straight back in flannel shirt and jeans. He moves bogenville blossoms and laurel berries into mounds of color. Where he has tended, the dirt neatens into rows. Japanese, I think, like a Buddhist monk making white sand around large stones humility infuses the light around him. By the time I finished my coffee, I've created a noble history for him. The coyote plays hide and seek with us a few yards here and there. It's sitting still as a boy in trouble, a fly catcher purchase, ready for the next insect to hatch and rise. The whitened rocks guide us back to the mesa edge to downpath to the square pebbles. Softly with date fall. The word 'mariposa' I have, but gone are the specific names, Latin or common, for the four butterflies skirting the mangrove edge. They lift as I near the black. Checkered one. A white one on the wide leaves succulent the teeny poor darted blue on the bush. The fourth ones, field marks escape my memory as my pencil finds my notebook flown. Gone. The beach is hard to traverse, made of one man rocks, a perfect size for lifting. Steinbeck also turned over these rocks on the shore of Islam. Aspera Tu Santo exposed marine creatures scattered or withdraw into the mud. He counted polo, thurians, brown sea cucumbers, millions babies inches in length. His lord from the Sea of Cortez reads we took a great many of them in the Reserve de la Biocera, el Biscano. The Yankee and local guides huddle, drinking something straight and strong. I can smell that gringo across the room. Ascent without story. Not wood burning or crease of bush or axle grease. I bet his wife is thinner than I am. I heard on public radio that celibacy for priests is not necessary for pastoral efficiency or personal holiness. This assertion, coming now, panics me. Hung on a shrub, the carcass shines red flesh marbled with fat and gripped with sinew. The great horned sheep's poor hooves gather to a point. Where are the viscera and backbone? Where is the troll, the curled horn, skull, lips and ears packaged to be flown north to taxidermist one aim, one shot for \$60,000. The hunting guide talks Spanish at me. All I can muster are the words [Speaks spanish.] Perhaps we shouldn't be here, I respond si to all he says. I find that repeating yes. si is the quickest ticket or an exit. Back on the road, descending the flanks of trays for Henny's volcano, David advises that saying yes in another's tongue

is a dangerous habit. The thoughtful men debate while crossing Baja whether humans should pause before killing anything equal to their intelligence. At a crossroad they marvel that a desert boy has all the words bayana, oceano, gaviota, Amaja, Samueforo. If the group meets someone speechless, is it therefore allowed to kill him? In 1857, Captain Scammen sailed through the narrows pleased to discover the waters widened a vast lagoon and in the shoal water gray whales by the thousands nurse their calves to a seaworthy weight in the shallow worm gray whales now an outline etched on a scrimshaw, my grandpa's name, his criminal board carved from whale bone from afar. Each gray whale scars are slashes, healed white, dealt by orcas going for the bihamas tongue. Huge meaty fat. Up close, the big whale parts. The sea comes up to wallow onto its left side to eye me, I see the blowhole tucker and exhale in the sputter adhered to its bristled side. Giant barnacles from raised patches colored sulfuric yellow. The crustaceans body plates react to air move. Crazy crackling with warning. Leading over the rolling beast I touched the lice segmented whitish feet club with pincers lice as big as sluggish. Rats and pincers grasping crawl among the barnacles hold on like a gaggle of Ahabs on their final ride. We are all in this boat together. She is squealing for the whale and the calf to swim to her. She wants to touch a whale. Come to me, mama. Come to me, baby. Light my fire. I want something else. She wants to nail Leonard Cohen. His next tour through images rushed me. Chelsea Hotel, now Berlin and Suzanne down someplace salty. Hallelujah. She asked, did you touch a whale? It's good luck to touch a whale. Someone told her. I am still on Leonard Cohen. Him touching her, him coming down from Mount Baldy. Robes hung on a pig running from Roshi. But back on Bogey Street what's it like? I asked, to ward her off. Pleasticle, answers the tour guide in my hands. A harpoon. I want a harpoon. The channels into the man grows deepened, not draining, but flooding, salt inland. We turned back and panicked tide has erased our footprints. We are not Jesus enough to walk on water, not Moses sufficiently to divide walk, but tourists, stupid about things local, hoping the stream bed is hard, the current not swift. The snakes say that I am swimming. Magnificent frigate birds overhead laughing gulls unsettled me." Thank you.

**00:14:29 Peggy**

Is that really your full time?

**00:14:33 Anne**

No, but it's close.

**00:14:35 Peggy**

Okay. That seems so short. I was just starting to like swim. And again, I was picturing Leonard Cohen.

**00:14:42 Anne**

Oh, good. Maybe I should put that earlier, but anyway, you can order this from Ravena Press and Accordos now. Three minutes worth. Thank you.

**00:14:59 Peggy**

And it's also quite an honor to have your inspiration and the combined work with Beau Frank to have him able to attend tonight from Korea. We got to say that this has allowed us to be much more national and international. So thank you all. Okay. Donna James, it is you're. Open mic time.

**00:15:27 Donna**

Oh, thanks. So, for those of you unfamiliar with Christian mythology, Damascus was the road that Saul was on when he had a vision of some sort and was converted to Christianity and became Paul. So this poem is called Damascus. "I came home from my office to a dark house. I found him on the floor, turned him over, shook him, punched in 911. She talked me through CPR. Between pushes, I yelled at him or whatever that was floating. 'Don't do this to me now. We're still in couples counseling,' aware it was a lie. I thought, 'Oh, no, he'll never get to see the end of the third season of Dexter. And I can finally get this damn wall-to-wall carpet out of here.' Fire engine, ambulance sirens. Men filed in, one of whom said, 'Look, the blood is already starting to pool.' They asked me, please leave the room. I sat on the front porch, where I began to fathom this had happened. Men filed out saying, sorry for your loss. Maybe there's a God, I ventured when they had gone and no one could hear. An odd visitation, but it counts as conversion. Death struck one fierce bolt to a heart, and I rose up agnostic." Thanks.

**00:17:05 Peggy**

Thank you so much for being here tonight. I have missed your very particular take on the world. It is a delight to hear. We now move. I'm going to ask Kathryn to say something so that she will be our speaker view, and then I can introduce her. Well, I'm delighted. You've been long scheduled, so I'm thrilled that you're able to be with us here tonight. Kathryn Thurber-Smith is a clinical supervisor at Seattle Children's Hospital, mindful-self compassion facilitator for parents of children with health issues, and a writer. She was raised bi-coastally in Washington DC and Olympia, has a BA from Grinnell College, where she was granted the Seldon Whitcomb Poetry Award, an MSW from University of Kansas-Lawrence, and advanced clinical supervision certificate from Smith College. Most recently, her work was featured in Susan Landgraf's craft book published by Two Sylvias Press. She lives on the traditional lands of the coast Salish people, now known as Wild Rose Ranch, near Langley, Whidbey Island. Welcome, Kathryn.

**00:18:15 Kathryn**

I want to once again acknowledge that I live, work, write and play on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Coast Salish. And I like to begin any communication that I have in a group with that land acknowledgment. I've lived a life of privilege, and I know that, and I know that that privilege was born and as a result of the brutality of colonialism. And I just want to bring that to the forefront. I want to thank you, Peggy, for having me back again. The last time that I read was pre-COVID. I want to thank Anna and Denny, my fellow readers, this evening, for sharing this venue. I'm just awed by the company I'm keeping, and I'm so grateful for this opportunity. So thank you. Before I delve into some of my latest work, I just want to reflect on the idea that art imitates life. Or as Oscar Wilde proclaimed, life actually imitates art. But you may find, as I read my latest poems, that in this case, art steals from life. And in this theft, hopefully there will be some phrase or stanza that resonates for you. And if you think you see yourself in a poem of mine, well, you probably do. Ellen Basse once said at a reading in

Seattle, if you are related to me, and in this case she was referring to her wife you better watch out. You might appear. No, you will appear in my work. I know this is true for many writers and certainly for me as well, but it's important to remember that once you enter my creative work, the person in the poem actually is no longer you. The person is the art. As you will see, I come to my work on the backs of many other smarter, more talented writers, musicians, family members, friends, all of whom are my mentors and are an integral part of my creative process. And I'm so excited to see so many of you here in the Hollywood Squares of Zoom. Truly, there isn't enough time in the day to name all of those who have given me the strength and courage to live out this lifelong passion of mine. But I do want to shout out to Debbie, who actually couldn't make it tonight, who held my hand through years of becoming a writer, and Donna, who has helped me at the beginning, and we've disappeared from each other. But now maybe Post-COVID will be able to connect a little bit more. Yvonne, Susan, Kelly and Elizabeth, you know who you are for being there for me, thick and thin and back again. Tonight is my opportunity not only to share my work, but to share my gratitude to you for being a source of inspiration to me. I don't know if this is possible, and I did have a little bit of a tutorial from my son before starting. I wanted to share my screen, if that's at all possible. What do you see? Somebody tell me what you see when you see a painting. It's the Conor in the back. Perfect. Okay. The first poem I'm going to read tonight was part of an exercise in crastic poetry, meaning it's born of a work of art, and this was an exercise done at Poets on the Coast, which is my first poetry community, really, that I participated in probably about six times, and where I met Donna and Debbie and so many others. In this case. My poem was a response to this painting. It's called "Snow King" by Clayton James, who's a Pacific Northwest painter whose work is a part of the permanent collection at the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner. In this particular exhibit this year, there were several letters and diaries entries as well in the exhibit, which led me to think about Clayton James's use of art, of commentary, and also his role in developing a community of nonviolent conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War era. This poem is called "Impermanence or How We Remain in Place While Still in Motion." "Doug Fir dances with Cedar and Alder Granite has already arrived erratic snow strokes and swaths of water shine against larches and salal. What if flames consumed the trail, crossed over a river, leaving clouds of ashes? What if there was suffering in that sky? Glaciers move their motives. Hidden under generations of ice, gamthsaw and oils saturate a pallet, a canvas, a postcard, a place in time, a reminder, a conscientious objection, a refusal to fit into the mold a life to live, a blight worth the fight. A labor camp pretending to be an artist colony. An artist colony disguised as a labor camp. One peak in one moment, in one space reflects unrequited desire for permanence. And who is to say who makes a difference? To whom in this world?" One more fun example of a poem with a particular form. This is a shout out to Jess Giggle, who did an eco poetry workshop maybe less than a year ago. It was definitely on Zoom. And this is a villanelle which has repeating lines. You'll probably sense that. And this is in particular an eco villanelle. "What floats downstream and what remains beneath the surface? Out of sight, shapeshifting, streams reflect our pains. A sprig of song water detains dragonfly's curse. Enemies fight. What floats downstream and what remains abandoned hook and line contains steps on shore, lost poles at twilight. Shapeshifting streams reflect our pains, lynch our lies. This water refrains refracting glow attracts the light. What floats downstream and what remains? Our sustenance. This bank pertains one earth, one stream, debris in flight. Shape shifting streams reflect our pains. Free floating fear now retrains soft imprint here the truth abstains what floats downstream and what remains? Shape shifting streams reflect our pains." I'm going to start into the

next column. It's called "I am Almost One of Them." "I clamber up the rotted shed, reach across bay laurel to catch chain no trespassing signs attempt to block us. Thrust my leg over loops, link my foot and lower into weeds with these boys who have done this before. Mud swallows and spits in my shoes, slurps and steals my soul into the soil. I strip off my tea and cut offs like everyone else, give up clothes to cattails and horse grass bogs thick cicada screeches obscure frog talk. This smells almost brackish, neither fresh nor salt jump into the headlight sheen surface stinking water sticky eye glow in my nakedness I slink home. Hair dreaded by underwater swims and stirred mud sighs shafing from wet denim." This next poem is called "Bunce." "Once she was her own nightmare. Jeans too tight, shoes too flat, hair too stringy, not quite long enough to hide behind. Once she sat down where her chair wasn't drinking from a new Snoopy. Thermos grape juice saturated her shirt and pants. That was the first and last best drink in that thermos. Once she got caught kissing a boy in a closet. She didn't even know it wasn't allowed. Their names crayons in hearts on boxes that held their make believe love. Once when they moved, she slept in a closet. Purple stained shirt half unpacked, undecided whether or not to come out. As uncertain as she was about being there. And it's the new neighbor, the one who feeds her raw hamburger, who tells her child in that box in the closet, you are never going to find happiness." So I am going to now try one more thing. There it is. Okay. I was still blocked from seeing everybody. I just want a chance to see everybody because I have so many friends and family that are here that I want to thank for being here. And just a little bit of a reminder to my kids who are here. This is the first time they've heard me read. This is the first time they've heard these ponds. I suspect they will probably see themselves or hear something about our family life. And I just want to assure you that it's still art. It's not you. And also I want to thank you for being inspirational to me. This poem is called "Losing Sleep Worrying about the Safety of My Children." "Unmade bed ripples with blankets and bunnies tucked in the sheets faded and pilly, barely covered the mattress. Only a tug will get them to fit. Trim, tattered. Probably from a pup who is now an old dog. Remember the time we starfished in our sleep? Our toenails tearing, thread bear fabric, crumpled quilt. Looks old to you? You've never seen the bed without it. I still feel its freshness, unfurled, spread over linens, stained from tears, shed over dead black molly and lost cats. Always. I prefer a percale longer cotton staple. Carpeted and combed, stiff and sturdy, it will always hold its shape. This one is called Dreams Defied. We didn't set out to struggle with bedtimes or morning rituals. We didn't set out to work SwingShift or on call for 20 years. We didn't set out to demand more than just manageable challenges. We wanted

### **00:30:29 Kathryn**

a reading addict hungry for more information, desiring tools and skills to keep doors left open, windows window latches unhinged. We wanted waking showers, walking, not running to class, shoes tied, backpacks loaded with textbooks and a sandwich, a protein bar, pretzels, chocolate milk. Somehow, neither of us remember a single family dinner. We no longer wonder why you couldn't wake up for school. It wasn't an option not going to high school. You didn't go. It wasn't an option obtaining a GED. You passed that test with honors. It's not an option not going to college. But you absorb more about engines one month on the job than set in structure in twelve years of sporadic school attendance. You know this way is not one I recognize. Your walk wasn't something discussed at my childhood dinner table. Steeped in academics and Ivy League hopefuls, I grieved this lost path I wanted for you. But now I soak in your stories of unscrewing an oil cap too fast and drenching

yourself. The viscous syrup in your hair, in your ear, on your face. A mistake only made once. I'm learning not to blame myself for your failures, and I don't get to take credit for your successes. And now I see they are the same." So another parenting time coming up. Probably my kids are glad they're not on the screen right now. Turning red. This one is a little bit older poem. It was written when one of my sons was 19, and they're both in their mid 20s, so that gives you a sense of how long ago this form was written. It's called "Out of Place." And actually, to be honest, I was planning to read this at the last It's About Time, but my time cut short, so I've been saving it. It's ready to be read, and it's probably gone through a few edits since then, but here it goes. It's called "Out of Place" for my 19 year old son at a poetry reading. "Crack your knuckles, displace the fluid in your finger joints too slump to my height in your velvet seat. We lower our eyes to blur the crowd. Level headed and forward focused, we try not to block anyone's view together you and I equal and relaxed we relate ice cream melts on our counter to chickens really do run in circles after their heads are cleaved cars slam into trees, discharge airbags and still crack a clavicle wrist ulna accidents happen, injuries heal shattered cell phones are replaced we inhale deeply fill and release the truth is here in these chairs and bones." This next poem is called "Homecoming." "The day you Left. I remember it was a ballsy exit instagram proof of life on the road the ginger stirfry lingers long after you are gone the dog dares not enter your barren room you catalogue to boarding through museums and embassies your black suit a witness to formal affairs the day you returned I remember it was a deliberate arrival status attended the non stick pan permanently crusted with egg residue offered to the dog some leftover love recalibrate your compass sever your plan time travel and muscle fatigue exhaust you a life deconstructed by stacked and crammed duffels open the stagnant room and curl into the width of your bed. The dog hesitates, senses a lack of life abandonment he does not whine with delight or leap into your body and while he does not recoil, his welcome is sure." I have another poem that of course draws upon my family and I just want to mention that my brother and his wife are in Quito, Ecuador and they have joined us tonight and I'm so glad they're here. And I had said to them earlier I'm sorry I don't have an interpreter or a translator for you because of course his wife is her first language is Spanish. So I was delighted that Anne had Spanish in her work earlier. I was like, Yeah, see, there is some Spanish there. So this call is called "My Brother Explains How to Get into His House." "He stands shifting his weight from 1ft to the other, his purple crocs worn from cobblestone streets. He starts to back away as I try to get closer to hear the instructions to see the keychain. He says please back off. I don't want to be that close to you. I don't want to stand so close either. But I can't understand what he is saying. I am trying to read his lips behind his mask, his pocket jingles. He pulls out more keys. He tries to show me which one will open the gate, the iron door, the front and also reminds me to turn the alarms off in a timely manner. He is sure I can remember the code words but if it's not they live on in the itinerary. I think to myself this was not the plan. He is counting bills from a bulging wallet and I am sure I have never seen that much cash in my life. He has explained more than eight times how to get in the gate, the door, the house. He knows that after eight times I will still struggle to find the right key and that key will still not turn without great effort he says it again it used to have a red sticker on it. He rubs his hands through newlygrade hair I'm not sure I know what to do. I rub the sweat in sheets down my legs he tosses the keys to me and one more time he says I have to shake the gate and try all the keys because maybe that wasn't the right one after all." Just a couple more if I have time. Is that okay? Peggy? Thank you.

**00:38:17 Peggy**

Sure. You got deprived last time.

**00:38:21 Kathryn**

Well, thank you. Thank you for your understanding. Some days this one is called "Some Days." "Some days I wonder if other people can feel the cloud cover inside my chest or smell soil microbes on my flesh it's not rotting but it doesn't smell fresh some days I wonder if I can untangle my hair from these spider webs or flirt with a butterfly by smearing banana on my arm it is always dark in this rainforest but if you look closely you will see bromeliads hanging on for dear life sneaking in a powerful bloom it is thick with the sounds of honey creepers and hawks frogs and rain and if you're lucky, a howler monkey or two some days I wonder when you see my cheeks are flushed or my eyes averting yours do you know how fragile I am? Do you know how parts of me die off every five minutes?" This poem is called "Once Upon a Time." "Blonde coarse screw spirals splayed on a white sheet bleached and worn but perfectly clean she is the mermaid she wanted to be on the white sand shores in this bed kept alive by the swoosh and thud as oxygen enters her lungs with a beat she will never dance to the television on the wall muted shows helicopters circling above our dream house that will never again be a home leather couches on terracotta tile placed to hold your kids and mine her picture flows between anchorman whose sorrow is lost in the footage of our manicured lawn perfect poolside noodles and that giant floating peacock we thought we had to have. And by had to have I mean we thought the kids needed plastic feathers to lean back on face to the sky our little pea chick on their laps a double decker ride I didn't mean we had to have it instead of girls who float or girls who swim." This next one is called "Instead of Death I Choose." This is the one that Sylvia's Press decided to put in Susan Langraph's book- "The Inspired Poet" - which I was so honored to be a part of. "Instead of death I choose to plan for tomorrow's tomorrow by a new planner and even scribble deadlines. I swoon at the Daphne Adora's return scent that rides dusk winds delivers hope to my naked nose instead of urine soaked folds of skin needles strewn at your feet eyes vacant, body rotting cracked chairs thrown at red lighted cars I choose to remember you are someone's son and I am someone's mother. Instead of accepting the Rich richer shipping overnight packages, breaking backs, displacing profits the rest of us fail to realize I choose to peruse the farmers market. Locals. Nourishing, locals. Instead of fear, I choose to sit with silenced silences 10 misconnections missed engagements never made and I approach you, old friend, with new bravery." So this is going to be my last poem. And this is a poem that was taking a form from another poet, from Susan Rich, a mentor of mine. And it starts out as her poem did with "If I Could." "If I could I would bring back your goldenrod cardigan with pockets of agats and cigarettes dance with you at St. Columbus Church on industrial tile and dust if I could I would add forgotten flour to your brownies break up egg yolks with a wooden spoon remind you to turn off the oven after rosemary and potatoes are roasted if I could I wouldn't pinch you in the arm leave an imprint of my thumb run from you barefooted through broken glass and spilt trash if I could I would watch you thread your needle so a straight seam so a row of peas I would hold your elbow on beach stairs not just because you might lose your balance if I could, I wouldn't wait for faltering footholds or missteps in a recipe to befuddle you. If I could, I would plant snapdragons and hope and moon sparkled suffers would blow you back to me." Thank you.

**00:44:27 Peggy**



Thank you. It was such a rich reading. I was covered so much ground in terms of your villanelle as well as the ecfastic and then such a range. But I have to say that perhaps as a parent, I just love your parenting poems. Which collection are they in? Any particular one?

**00:44:52 Kathryn**

No. Maybe it's time for them to be in the collection.

**00:44:56 Peggy**

Yeah. What was the name of the one that has the sheets in it again and the blank?

**00:45:01 Kathryn**

Oh, yeah. I don't know their names by heart well enough. Hold on. I should have memorized it myself. I think it had children in the title. "Losing Sleep, Worrying about the Safety of My Children."

**00:45:17 Peggy**

Perfect. Thank you so much.

**00:45:20 Kathryn**

Thank you, Peggy, for your sweet comments.

**00:45:24 Peggy**

Make sure that now that you can relax, you can read all the compliments in the chat. Oh, my goodness. Yeah, thanks. It's like the silent applause. Okay. All right. Well, Sylvia, your next step for our open mic. So say hello so that we can have you on the screen. And first, I'm going to use your backdrop to make a little appeal. We have so many amazing writers here tonight, many names that I recognize and those that I don't. I know that Anne Keller is going to be reading with us as part of her writing group in June. Suzanne Edison will be with us in September. And I hope that the rest of you will contact me at [peggystirdiven@gmail.com](mailto:peggystirdiven@gmail.com) to schedule your reading because I'm still filling in for summer and all the way through the rest of 2022. So please, what a wonderful opportunity. You too can have an audience in Quito and Korea and Singapore and Mexico, wherever you want before we have the opportunity to go back in person in the library. That's taking advantage of being able to be so widely shared. And now, thank you, my dear friend, Sylvia.

**00:46:50 Sylvia**

All right, I have another Letitia and Black Dog poem for you. Some of you know I have written a number of poems about a persona called Letitia who's a character I have created to allow me to channel all kinds of stuff. And the Black Dog we all know what the Black Dog is. Anyway, this poem is called "Unheard Of." "The Black Dog could care less that Letitia cannot hear wind, poetry or birdsong without her hearing aids. He speaks directly inside her head sometimes spends a whole day repeatedly whispering how worthless she is. She does her best to ignore him. He's a clever dog with lots of tricks. He sucks the marrow from her bones, buries them in the garden. He nips at her ankles, trips her up. He's a dead weight she must drag up the stairs. Sometimes he sits on her stomach, makes her nauseous. He can render her food tasteless, keep her awake through the night, pinion her

to the bed in the morning. Even when she's not hearing his voice, she feels him, knows what he wants, is surprised when she looks in the mirror and sees her human face. Not a panting, fur covered muzzle, sad eyes, perky ears." Thank you.

**00:48:34 Peggy**

Like I'm the only one who never knew until you explained to me what the Black Dog was. But I think that's because my whole life summary on Martha's Vineyard we have the Black Dog Ship and the Black Dog Tavern, which became the ubiquitous Black Dog tshirts and towels and everything. And the funny thing is that William Styron lived within about a mile of the Black Dog. So thank you for-

**00:49:04 Sylvia**

Now you know that Samuel Johnson was the first one to invoke that.

**00:49:12 Peggy**

Always showing my ignorance in your company. Thank you for joining us. Come anytime, come every time. Okay, now for our final featured reader. Tonight you can call him Denny or maybe you can call him Nicholas. I've never seen anyone do that. But Denny is someone who, in person has never failed to surprise us, whether it was drums, cutouts. I can't even go through the litany of ways that he has astounded us in person. And I had not seen him online until I ran into him, I believe, on New Year's Eve day at the fish market when a meat truck was embedded against my house. So with that as a backdrop. I shall read what he thought construed a bio at the time. Nicolas (Denny) Stern. Guilty in a trial of errors but leaps the tall sentence in a single paragraph to live at large under the small radars of the grammar police, and the running noses of sniffing critics to bask in the magisterial solipsistic splendor of a post romantic indulgent anonymity and....promises to provide a less silly and more considered short bio. Here's my friend Denny who combines the ecstasy in body and poetry. I mean, it's like he creates it and he is it. Welcome. How is that for an introduction, Denny?

**00:50:58 Denny**

Hey. Well, thanks. I think you're going to have to write a poem about that fish truck incident.

**00:51:05 Peggy**

Excuse me? I have to say, I saw you at the fish market, but there was a meat truck stuck against our house and we didn't even get any meat.

**00:51:18 Denny**

Oh, the meat truck incident?

**00:51:20 Peggy**

Yeah.

**00:51:21 Denny**

Okay. Yeah. Actually, that sounds like the name of a short story or something. The Meat Truck Incident. Thank you everybody for your reading and thank you, Peggy, for being here and inviting me

to read and share my work with you tonight. Thanks to Anne and Kathryn and Donna and Sylvia, all for reading. And Kathryn. Well, we're here in Ballard, so this is Duamish territory, I believe. Unceded. Absolutely. In fact, if anybody thinks of it, if they go to the Ballard, if you want to look up forgotten but good poets, then in the Ballard Library there's a book called Palms of the Ish River by Robert Sund. Quite a good poet. So for the past four Aprils I've written a poem a day and also have done so for the past 18 months. Most of tonight's selection was written last month. I'm largely a shape poet, by which I mean that I often write an irregular visual configurations, usually in an extemporaneous process of engagement. Sometimes I'll watercolor or collage afterwards and often I type the text later to make it easier to read. But I'm also consistently inconsistent about all of this, so I'll do whatever, but I'm terrible with all things tech. And so my brother Harry hooked me up with a PowerPoint which hopefully I can access so that I can sort of give you an example of some of these, like, visual drafts as written as I go along. So I'm going to hit the screen share here and see if I can get that going. Okay. "April rain king, lilac, queen pink, pale of the frail stutter of gutters fills buckets barrels for plant kingdoms of rain clouds bless soil with moisture in piles of pillars, streaks of gray falling long in the hip on horizons of doubt sure as the sheets of steps find wet footing even as the odd meter lands on the other limb and trumpets, wind of swans, brass and princes of horns blast the incoming tide. Discord of words reordered. No one rules but rhythms of borderless sky where the unformed mindless mind searches for the words that are not there imagined citadel who can find you in the pause, pausing to the ringing collar around the cat's neck? Warning birds 20 rotundas edifice of stars built on ether hear this silence one voice rung on a ladder's, rung as small as a rabbit's whisper given the idol, the motor spoke in a language of machines no truth but misgivings among the hollow eyed burl of the elm sparrow a moment's notice of flickers tap on mossed peaks above the rafters and the dusk of a thousand numbers show their hands as digits add much about mulch browns and ochres, yellow to green at the helm of the tall ship of a forest of masts, a mast where swells the bow bowing as primary colors bow to sky after rainfall." The poet Eileen Tabios, who I just learned about back in March, invented her own form of haiku she calls hai naku, whose form is a single word line followed by a double word line followed by a triple word line, for a total of six words per hainaku. And Eileen Tabios' idea was in part influenced by a quip of Jack Carragher. The haiku in English shouldn't have more than three words per line, so these are some of my uses of her form. "Poetry tries tropes on for size words on water float the surface, head out yonder feet stay put inside the shell of a kayak sails streak across below the sunset porpoise swims by for a purpose seals swim past for no purpose full moon robs a cloud bank earth oblate spheroid on a roll acquire of acquire acquire sounds of wind a sharer lens of ear a river sounds of rock, a flute rings of birds, freight trains shuffle of blues as canyons can of echoes drum on skin sticks of bone call to spirit, dance of home. Meanwhile, in another time zone past the porous borders of the harmonics wind chimes and pines a perfect fir cone dress an ancient novel of timeless themes what of is and can be who and fir tree Perception 910 reception but who follows recipes? The curve bends in both directions is discretion the better part of intention? Rain from the eye of clouds sheets of tears tear torn paper droplets hurry earthbound ephemera and effluvium the spindly legs of birds are many cited mind zones the minstrel a kestrel dove the weave of a carpet marbled marvels of murmurs in owls haven of the commons a command location this frustration noon is too soon to hear this tune the time has paused and will be replayed here's a few more high knockouts healing dogs cure their owner's woes wagging dogs wait for the pitch one dog gone, two tree cats, cats in suits tip dogs kibble dogs prove God is a Dyslexic note to self right to dwarf hello

goodbye sale till Friday see Jerry Garcia dead head ahead one house's story once there was a house with one wall. Everybody called it a fence, which it found belittling, so it put up another wall. Then everyone called it a corner. After the third wall, they called it a shell. When the roof went on, they called it a shelter for the last wall. The house put in a folding door, and then everyone called it a garage. Then the house put itself on wheels. They called it a truck, but it considered itself a house with mobility. Last I heard, it swapped its wheels for pontoons and became a catamaran. But it did tell me it aspired to be a boat house. One day, wrap, tap and ringtone rained on the roof, small proof of the knock as knock cans down the rocky path, summoned to jury in a trial to peer at the joy of wrapping flickers mining grubs for a j's lark drunk as cedar waxwings on berries will while and whiplash as warble and flight outdoor. The humming whirl as it were, of the hovering beak, soundless as it were buried by the mechanical of the furnace drawing air in a threadbare corner of tapestry drapery. Sunlight spills stairs spiral over marvels of borders, marbled floors, mixed shadows and mahogany bench busts gaze living in stone on pedestals. One smiles churlish at a fellow head and he trusted on a sarcophagi and says from across the room, in the absent presence of the old museum, I'm fixing the bust out of here. No one could figure out who removed the bust of the old unidentified philosopher with the inscrutable grin, or how he vanished traceless from the panoply of ancient figures housed in room 47 without a trace. No fingerprints, signs of movement, camera footage, nothing out of place more valuable collectibles left untouched. One security guard thought it peculiar that she had never noticed. How about relief portrait on an Etruscan sarcophagi across from where the bust had been, now appeared to be winking."

**01:00:54 Denny**

"My aunt and mother passed his photo to and fro as if a talisman for a lark, passing his image on, surreptitiously the grainy news print portrait, grinning with charmed humor of a familiar punchline between sisters, for years, in fact, till the yellow paper had faded, just as my brother never failed to reduce our sister to a fit of unstoppable laughter merely by looking serious, whilst twitching one nostril ever so subtly with the utmost seriousness, while asserting, sententiously with humorless gravity, that nothing was funny. And often there is nothing funnier than the funny, nothing into something like the recipe for mock apple pie or the proudly baked confection my grandfather received each year, whose maker boasted of its lack of butter and sugar and which he privately referred to as shit cake, something the giver might not have found funny had they known. But as to who knew, you knew. The answer is well known, as he was a Buddhist politician and playwright, the first prime minister of Myanmar, an anti fascist deposed in a coup, but who appears to have never lost his sense of humor. Where the purple martin's nest something in the seeming of the sameness, of blankness as of a wall bathed in light, a screen cast a shadow, one line strung as strum. Two birds landed there, parsing in the passing whistle spoke here and amalgam of anthem, of freedom, of squeak or squawk, of kuku koul, of unseen doves, of Russell and bushes, of rhododendron, of purples thinking, of the countervailing green, of complementary grass, of the long time coming, of age, of notwithstanding an ovation of a silent oration of pink clouds crowdsourcing the spacious blue for a place rent free to view sunset. Everyone watches on their phones, and the sun and shimmer asks no one's nod to act, speaks, no rolls nor slips as photons pour and pores and oval boards, round grown shells, thin and hard yet hollow, serve as vessels can be poured, filled with water or air to sound as such structures thereon in and out of earth, can be made to ring true as purple martens nests, or the belly of a drum

where the palm thumps base solid on the bottom near the stem, and the rung nose stings yawning in the dawning of a dim awakening. One nod shy of delirium of allesian allysiac lilac, budding. Six sea lions sleeping on a barrel log sleek fat loungers. One sniffs the sun as if trying to balance it like a beach ball on its bodacious nose. A 7th swims alongside an ascent cord, darkly resonant like an ass, leaps aboard, tilting the barrel with a muscular clang of a powerful jump, and all six sleepers groan, shifting and yelping as the barrel tips nearly capsizing. Someone must have the act on their phone, the twitter prone or the candied stoned patient is dreaming. Lions see the seabound bounders sleep and swim in the cycle of tides, and the days of day talk as speech unfolds in the moment of its conception, in reaction relation and answer to whatever is occurring in the spaces around. And so a continuous rephrasing of the present moment is both a reality and a necessity that no fixity can conspire to contain, and distinctions with their fictions fail to deliver. Or a pizza with a different topping arrives unordered, and someone says that was just in time, the kids are ravenous and somebody spent all the money on beer. But someone else says I'm vegetarian and this is a pepperoni. Opportunists come and go, but the time is always now for discovery or recovery of the forgotten, the recommendation of an oration of relation to parley in this fairy tale where, which is which and which is the other, and a switch of willow tells the medium where to dig the well. Well, can you dig it? And out of the box lunch for free. Who knew? Corona beer, band virus, tiara none or all of the above. A mad king is crowned with insanity. And only if he tosses his corona to the wind will he become sane, recognize the authority of no authority and hear poetry in a conch shell. It's a breeze, said the wind on winding herself, even if I am only the gust of honor." Thank you.

**01:06:25 Peggy**

You can see why I love running into Denny at the fish market, by the way. For one of his last in person readings. He did an incredibly beautiful chapbook with that kind of illustration and art. And they are still available. They're \$15. Correct, Denny?

**01:06:46 Denny**

\$20. Inflation.

**01:06:51 Peggy**

Yeah. But anyway, I can't get enough of them because I love to send them to students of all ages. It just expands our minds in terms of what's possible. And to think that you do that every day. I'm very excited about it. Thank you. All right, do I have any other open mic people? Just checking. Love the Ballard sign, Katie. Or a screen view? We're going to close with a final poem from Anne Spears who started us off tonight. And then I will turn off the recording so we can do any additional chitchat and I can still dish on Topsfield, Massachusetts and say only nice things about South Peabody. I'm so glad you were all here tonight and please do contact me to schedule a reading in the future. So, Anne, come on back.

**01:07:53 Anne**

Yes, well, thank you. I didn't get the memo about the length of the reading, so I welcome to read long and I'm going to read a few from "Rain Violence." Remember, they are the international weather symbols that individual weather watchers citizen scientists went out into their surroundings and took

down on a grid present weather. And they used different symbols like rain and lightning. And eventually when the telegraph came along in the 1830s or 40s, they could email these reports into a central location like Philadelphia. And then the newspapers picked them up and they started weather forecasting and weather reporting. And I'm going to do this one: "Is Rain Violent?" But I'm going to just read a few of the drizzle ones. The drizzle is a drop. So there's drizzle, slight drizzle, heavy drizzle and so on. And I started writing these in 2001 when I went to a Northwest geologic meeting. And Peter U. Clark from the University of Arizona said, Climate change. And for the rest of his hour he went through the different scientific research that showed the climate had been changing drastically since late 1800. And I looked around and all the old guys sitting around when he had finished and no one was weeping. And Peter Euclid said, we have 100 years. Well, so now it's 1920 and we're really facing climate change. So for the next 20 years, I started noting in my life and in reading and in myth and UFOs anything that said to me, oh, climate change is happening. So this one is "Drizzle Flight." "Our news on paper remade from shreds cleansed with caustics printed in soy inks recycled headlines bleeding again polio Palestine dust and dead water drizzle continue climbing the mountain children flipped two man rocks exposing undersides laced with grubs and white threads flora, fauna, there'll be something they concur drizzle mary loses her face first jesus lasts the pieta erodes to occur holding in agony rain dissolves galgatha's small wounds drizzle thick, freezing no berries thus no bear rising from the thicket no awe at ursa circling the North Star no goldilocks at my door with fattened bear stories drizzle not freezing the moon's rigged edge rests dusk we walk out into the field of wet our gardens last cut mint or cane or nettle grief in every handful." Thank you.

### **01:11:55 Peggy**

Thank you so much, Anne. I'm somewhat weather obsessed myself. And here in the front page of the Boston Globe for some years now, every day when they do a little icons with the weather, they make it a pun. I wonder who sits around thinking of a pun for the weather every single day. And Denny, what you reminded me of, and something that Holly Hughes told my attention to, probably on Facebook a couple of weeks ago, if you haven't all seen it, it looks like a similar kind of what did you call it? No Naiku? No haiku? Something bird notes. During the month of April, they did feature Joanne Clements poetry. She had done something similar. It was punctuation. And each punctuation the first word, and then each thing featured a certain bird like semicolon exclamation mark, whether it's a cormorant or moon or question mark. And that's another thing. I just haven't been able, along with your chapbook, to stop sharing in recent days, especially for aspiring writers, because I work with a lot of young students. It just really blows their mind, you know, they hear poetry and they think, Yeah. And then you show them this and it's like a lotus flower opening. Anyway, thank you all for helping to expand all of our minds. I am going to stop the recording now. Thank you all for being part of reading number 390 of It's About Time Writers' Reading series.