



Library podcast

Armistead Maupin

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[00:00:44] Today's program with Armistead Maupin. My name is David. I'm a librarian here and I have just a few words before we get started. This program today is sponsored by the Seattle Public Library Foundation, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The foundation is made up of thousands of people in our community who give gifts, large and small to support our libraries. To all of the foundation donors who are here with us today. Thank you so much for your support. I would also like to recognize and thank The Seattle Times for their continued support for programming at the Seattle Public Library. We are delighted to be partnering with Seattle Pride Fest on this program. Also, thanks, go to the Elliott Bay Book Company for coordinating the book sales here this afternoon. As I said earlier, if you don't have all of his books, they can fix that for you. And if you do have all of his books. Think what a joy it would be to give those books to somebody else. Maybe if a fresh new set. So without any further ado, I would like to introduce Egan or Ryan, the director of Seattle Pride Fest, to introduce our special guest today.

[00:02:03] Thank you, David. They are ready for coming. Happy pride.

[00:02:07] You can you can look for for for me and Armistead and Ahmed. That's husband Christopher. We're gonna be grand marshals in the parade tomorrow. And we're writing in the same Mini Cooper, which should be something amusing to watch. So anyway, so thank you. Thank you so much for coming out today. I am the festival director for Pride Fest. We are in year five. We took over from C.I.A on Proud. Who did it the first year that was downtown. We took over after that. When thinking about who we want to bring in for pride this year, I didn't want to do it necessarily. Just another musical act. You know, we've we've seen, you know, them all come through. I was thinking about 30 years of HIV AIDS. I'm thinking about all the progress that we've made and about who is touching me individually and us as a community. When I got back from Europe when I was 18, I'd taken a trip to Europe and I was in my brother's apartment in Los Angeles. And he had a book on his bookshelf, Tales of the City.

And I pulled it open and I was on vacation. So I just I read it and I was not fully out then and living the living through those characters. I was able to finally get to a place where I was comfortable and being gay. And I know that he has transformed so many lives by the stories that he's he's told. And and I'm very grateful for that. So I want to bring him in so he could talk directly to you guys during pride. And so I want to introduce to you a hero of mine. Armistead Maupin.

[00:03:56] Thank you very much. You know, I met Eagen when I was I accepted a gig on the Isle of Island of Lanai, a resort out there back in 1999, told me that I could stay free of charge at the resort for a week if I'd come to a reading. I think that's the first time I had ever, ever had a pedicure. I went through that damn hotel. Any any service that was available. I avail myself. And I had to go up to the lodge on the top of the mountain there for the reading. It was very intimate. It was a small room with a fireplace. And this cute young guy, 20 something or other. What were you like 28 at that point or something? Came over with a very tanned, beautiful young woman from Maui. They'd come over for the day to hear me read. It's terrible to say you remember the cute fans, but you do.

[00:04:44] I guess many years ago I was talking to Bob Kolar, cellos, a sky very Republican guy that Rand Interview magazine for Andy Warhol, which is a pretty Republican outfit, mysteriously enough.

[00:05:01] And I said I was so excited about the fact that I was going to be doing a reading in Venice Beach in California because I hadn't done many outside of San Francisco. And I said, I know there can be surfers there. And he looked at me and said, Darling, didn't anybody ever tell you surfers don't go to book signings? But when Egan told me that Chris and I. And then he would all be writing. Give us a mike, Chris, please stand with my husband, Christopher Turner.

[00:05:36] I know it sounds immodest, but I asked him if there was gonna be a sign on the side of the car identifying who we were, because Chris and I did the parade in Palm Springs a few years back and we wrote in this lovely sort of kit car says, Older gentleman there had an old doosan bird that had been re-created. It was a beautiful car, but there was no sign identifying us. So we went down the main drag in Palm Springs with people going, Who are you?

[00:06:08] So he ended up having this big gesture we would do, and they aren't really the only fun of the day came when we stopped at a stoplight and there was some.

[00:06:18] They weren't the Westboro Baptist Church, but they might as well have been screaming idiot religious fanatics there. And Chris and I basically made out in front of them.

[00:06:32] Which, you know, that all the steam was coming out of their ears and some guy when he was up there screaming his fag fuckers, fag fuckers. Who? Who else are we gonna fuck?

[00:06:52] He's making a rule and say, fuck, at least three times in a library, I don't know what there is about it, but I really feel to be.

[00:07:01] It is a great day in the history of civil rights, isn't it?

[00:07:15] I've been here long enough to not know where my glasses are anymore, but Chris and I went up to Capitol Hill to the I guess what's called the Pike Pain area now.

[00:07:26] And I had no idea how exciting it was getting up there. Wonderful dining opportunities, a great mix of gay and straight and cute bear bar.

[00:07:36] And we came back to the hotel. I got a went to feed my addiction Facebook and got immediately got online.

[00:07:47] And I saw a posting from Harvey Firestein saying justice, equality, something all capital letters and exclamation marks. And there were people who were following the live feed. So I hopped on and said, start spreading the news. I can't help. It lies of anelli comes to be at all gay moments.

[00:08:07] And it was the most thrilling thing to see the people piling on board. You know, I don't think I've ever seen such a quick response and from all over the world and gay and straight all. Hallelujah.

[00:08:19] You know, it was amazing, beautiful thing. And and it's just, you know, we've all seen this struggle going on for a very long time now, at least the older ones of us have. And there have been times when it's felt like it wasn't going anywhere. But in fact, we've been changing hearts and minds all along. I won't blow my whole whatever they call it, keynote address that I'm supposed to be giving tomorrow. But that's this essence of what I've been saying all these years. If we truthful about ourselves and let love guide us, because that's what this revolution is about. It's that simple. We're the ones who've known all along that it's been about love and family and commitment. It's the other side that's obsessed with sex. And they're losing now in a big way. There was some tweet from the I don't know one of those.

[00:09:18] The National Organization for if it's got family in it or research, you can pretty well. It's amazing that these people that don't believe in science believe in research. But.

[00:09:37] But they it was very ominous. They said, we don't know what's happening. Terrible things happen in the dark in New York.

[00:09:47] And then there's that wonderful picture on the cover of The New York Times today of the joy, the celebration outside of the Stonewall Inn. And that and the dignity, I mean, of those people of my generation realized that the real miracle here is that The New York Times is celebrating this. Finally, I think I don't know what it was. It wasn't the times they wouldn't

even have covered it. But when Stonewall actually happened, when the rebellion happened, it was the headline was it was in the post or something, queen bees or stinging mad. You know, there wasn't even the dignity of accepting what was happening. Just the just the just ridicule.

[00:10:28] What's the great Gandhi line? First, they let me see if we get that right. You're going to correct quote Gandhi. You'd better, I guess, for a first they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then you fight, then you win. And that's what's happened. That's what's happening to us. We can feel it right now. It's very exciting.

[00:10:50] So tonight, because you're a good Northwestern crowd, I want to read us especially filthy section of Miranda and Autumn.

[00:11:02] I didn't have the nerve to tell this, but to read this particular thing on the tour. For a while I wasn't sure how well it would go over. Fortunately, I have two of my friends here who live out on Vash on Island. Matt Alber and Phil Jamison sitting right here. And I can personally blame it entirely on them because they told me the story to begin with. And I. I built it into, as I often do, into the story itself after I've read. I'm really happy to talk to you about anything to answer any questions you might have about. That's my favorite thing to do, really. You might know we've got a musical going on down in San Francisco right now based on tales of the city. I just read yesterday that when the Giants played the Dodgers on July 19th, that the cast of Tales of the City will be singing the national anthem.

[00:12:09] This might actually force me to go to a baseball game.

[00:12:17] Marianne and Autumn, just a blue background for those of you who don't know where we are in the story here. This is Mary Ann Singleton, who is the answer you knew in Tales of the City that I started with 35 years ago. In this place in the story, she's 58 years old. She's come to San Francisco. None of this is really pertinent, this reading, because she's not even in this chapter, but she's staying with her friend, Michael Tolga, who's in his who's married and in his late fifties, married to a man who's 20 years younger, named Ben.

[00:12:53] And in this particular chapter, Ben and Michael are well, it should explain itself, but they're going to a party that went to a dinner party.

[00:13:02] Oh, and by the way, an old roommate of mine. This is like old home week, an old room mate of mine from back in San Fran, back in the late 70s in San Francisco, who is one of my personal heroes. I remember when I met him, I was just gaga. I thought that we might end up being roommates who made history by being the first professional athlete to be out of the closet. Dave Kopay of the Forty Niners and the Redskins.

[00:13:42] As a young man, you might have a good time tonight, Dave. Noticing someone appreciating you. We remember when Herb Cain announced that we were rooming together in

San Francisco and everybody thought we were a big hot item. We were we were brothers in the revolution.

[00:14:03] And really, it's we have to. The thing about this movement is that we have to we have to keep just doing it over and over again because people keep thinking it's the first time it's ever been done, but they've been brave people for a long, long time. And I guess that's why I lose patience when somebody just now tells me that someone younger than I am has a generational problem with being out of the closet. Christopher Isherwood was 75 years old when I met him and back in the late 70s. And he was a model for me and that he was cheerfully and bravely hims himself. And it showed in the quality of his life.

[00:14:43] The chapters called Dwelling on Things. Watch it. You helped Michael. That guy is totally shitfaced. Ben winced, tightening his grip on the steering wheel. I see him. Don't. It didn't look like it. Michael. OK, fine. He was staggering into the street. That's all. You could barely see him in the dark. I saw him. I was trying to be helpful. It doesn't help when you do that. Believe me, Michael maintained a moody silence as they passed Dolores Park on their way down 18th Street to the mission. When they spoke again, his hand was on Ben's thigh. Is it backseat driving when you're both in the front seat? Ben smiled, but said nothing in the five years they'd been a couple. He'd always been the one to drive when they travel together. They both preferred it that way. Since Michael was a dangerously nervous driver, though, he hadn't. That hadn't stopped him from being helpful to the point of obnoxiousness. Then let go of it most of the time, since he knew it had far less to do with control issues than with Michael's morbid preoccupation. Tonight they were on their way to see their friends Marc and Ray at their flat on farrokh Street. The difference in their ages was almost the same as Ben, and Michael's making the older couple both an intergenerational role model and for better or worse, a possible bellwether of things to come. I love that Ray had. I didn't mean the passage. I mean the sound of a baby. That's so lovely. There was a time when they would let a baby within 100 yards of me.

[00:16:31] Had all Simers these days a fairly mild form, as market gamely put it, which rendered him foggy but jali a nicer person by far than his former ornery self. It was Mark, poor guy who'd been shafted in the bargain.

[00:16:46] The lupine young man in drawstring pants, whom Ray had fallen for one balmy night at Short Mountain, had been forced after 30 years of a contented man on man love to open their relationship to another person. This made for some interesting dinner parties.

[00:17:04] Gentlemen, gentlemen, Ray crooned from the top of the stairs as soon as he had buzzed them in. Did you find a place to park? No problem, yelled Ben, peering up that alpine slope at the lower half of Ray's skinny legs. It amazed Ben that the old man could still negotiate this climb. It was saddening to have such demonstrable proof that Ray's body had outlasted his mind. He was wearing sneakers tonight. Ben noticed fluorescent green ones

polka dotted with peace signs which an outsider might have taken as another sign of dementia. Ben saw them as an echo of Ray's radical days and therefore found them reassuring.

[00:17:47] Cool shoes, he said. Who, me? Who else? He kissed, raised parchment cheek, joining him on the landing. Don't let my husband see them. He'll want some. Ben seized raise hand and held onto it. Where is he? Down here with the Sherpas. Michael was halfway down the stairs, exaggerating his breathlessness as he held tight to the iron banister. It was the game he always played, opposed to make Ray feel younger and stronger. Ben loved him for it. Come on, said Ray, beckoning Michael with the skinny arm. There's hot buttered rum at the summit. They followed Ray and what Ben always thought of as the great room along warmly lit space on which this couple had left their vaguely hippie typified mark since the early 80s. There was nothing special about the flat decorative Lee speaking Bohemia. By way of Pottery Barn. But Ben loved the sheer archaeology of the place. The history buried under magnets on the refrigerator door. These guys had lived a life here, and it showed. Ray hollered into the kitchen from Mark, who appeared seconds later carrying a tray of mismatched ceramic mugs. What is it you can't face? The old man hooted with laughter, then shot a glance at Michael, and saw that he had been every bit as jolted by the greeting as Ben himself.

[00:19:14] It's from the sound of music.

[00:19:16] Mark explained, holding the tray out to guests.

[00:19:21] You know the scene where I was going to do that? Said Ray, interrupting. To what? Bring out the rum. That's sweet, my darling. But it's hot. Not to mention buttered. Mark shot a knowing look at Ben and Michael. Ben could remember a time only a few years earlier when Ray could be entrusted with a tray of cocktails without danger of losing a drop. No longer. Apparently, Michael took one of the mugs. I don't get it. Watts from the sound of music. Ray grinned impishly. The Mother Superior says it, too. What's your name? The star. Julie Andrews. Michael offered. What is it you can't face? This time it was Ray who said it. Giggling. Ben was still lost. Is this in a drag version or something?

[00:20:16] It's in the movie, said Mark. Julie doesn't want to be a nun anymore and tells the Mother Superior she just can't face it anymore. So the Mother Superior says, what is it you can't face? You know that with a broad European, a Hanse. What is it you can't face? Ray crowed the line one more time before pressing his fingers to his mouth. Hope our lead didn't hear. She hates that kind of talk.

[00:20:51] Ben's eyes darted, not darted nervously toward Michael, who in turn glanced at Marc, who connected with them both in a cat's cradle of wordless mortification. Shall we get comfortable? Said Marc. Eileen should be down soon, said Ray. She's putting her face on. Mark sighed and took Michael's arm, leading the way to the sofa. Ben sidled up next to Ray, placing his hand on the small of Ray's back, as he did his level best to shift the focus. I hear you guys went out to Cavallo Point last week. Hmm. What do you think of the new restaurant?

It used to be a military base, you know. I did, yes. Did you like it? Ray eased himself into a big armchair, upholstered in paisley wool. I thought it was completely stark and charmless, to tell you the truth, and way too expensive. I agree with you completely. Arlene adored it, though she's always been partial to fancy places.

[00:21:50] Arlene had once been raised wife. They had divorced several months before the life changing fairy gathering where he met Mark. Arlene had stayed in Fort Wayne for a few more years before moving to South Dakota with a widower she'd met on a bus tour of the Holy Land. After that, by mutual consent, Ray and Arlene lost touch. Ray, in fact, hadn't learned of Arlene's death until eight months after her funeral when a former neighbor from Fort Wayne was visiting San Francisco. Mark, who was almost 40 by then, had never even met Arlene, had confessed shamefully to a certain relief with Arlene gone. The slate would finally be clean. Ray would be his and his alone. Or so he thought. Eileen had come back with a vengeance after Ray came down with Alzheimer's. It wasn't that his failing mine had resurrected the strain decade he'd spent with Arlene. It had simply imported her into his life. Anything Ray had shared with Mark inevitably became a fond, fuzzy memory of life with Arlene. She was gobbling up Mark's marriage like a fungus. Even recent events like Cavallo Point where, if Ben recall correctly, the two men had celebrated their 30th anniversary after dinner, while Michael and Ray were having coffee in the great room. Ben helped Mark with the dishes. It's getting worse, isn't it?

[00:23:18] Mark nodded grimly. Last week he told the cleaning lady that him and Arlene had just gone to the nude beach and speeches. Ouch. It wasn't like he ever loved her. He didn't even like her that much. He barely talked about her at all for 30 years. Then Towel dried a plate and handed it to Mark. Do you ever correct him? They tell you not to. They say it just confuses them and makes them feel bad. He put the plate on the shelf above the sink. I really hate that dead bitch. Michael smiled faintly. At least he still remembers me, said Mark. I shouldn't complain. Go ahead. You're entitled. No, really. We still have the moment. That's all anybody has. And he's always a lot of fun. As if on cue, Ray bellowed from the great room. I leaned. We need a filler up out here. You still there, Arlene? Mark sighed and grabbed the carafe off the coffee maker. He muttered as he leaned into the swinging door.

[00:24:36] I have to tell you, I had the best time saying cunt face at the Sydney Opera House kids.

[00:24:47] Any questions? Yeah, let's talk. Who wants to toss out the first one? OK.

[00:24:57] Sure. I met Rock Hudson. Well, the way most gay people met Rock Hudson. By that I mean through friends. I mean, you know, other gay people. He had he lived he lived a very you know, he had a pretty active social life. He had a partner named Tom Clark. It's so full, so angering to watch the Hollywood press, pretend, pretend that there's some big, dark, secret, hidden market, whole house parties. And they'd be written up in The Hollywood REPORTER

and they'd say Tom Clark and Rock Hudson had, I don't know, Claire, Trevor and her husband over to play bridge or whatever.

[00:25:33] And I met him through it, through somebody that I met at a Palm Springs and the night before. This is really very I was thinking of this recently because we just hit the thirty fifth anniversary of Tales of the City the night before it was supposed to appear in the Chronicle that the serial was invited by Rock and a bunch of other friends of mine up to his suite at the Fairmont Hotel. And I had bragged that day at lunch to rock it, that I had the cereal that was going to be running in the paper the next day. And he, without telling me, went up to the desk clerk and got what they used to call the bulldog edition of the Chronicle, the one that was published in those days the night before.

[00:26:19] And when we were all assembled, there was about a dozen of us, I guess, in this big hotel suite. He said, I have a reading I'd like to do. And he got up and he read a little bit drunkenly. But it was still touching the first chapter of Tales of the City. And it's quite it was quite bizarre because in that first chapter, Marianne the Örjan, who is on the phone to her mother in Cleveland saying, I like it here and I'm not coming home. And what does a mother say? It's dangerous out there.

[00:26:51] Your father and I were just watching McMillan and wife and there's a killer on the loose or something to that effect.

[00:27:00] So I always wondered what was in my stars during that that time.

[00:27:05] And I did when he when the his AIDS diagnosis was announced, it was very clear to me and a lot of people that knew him that the very old timey folks that were around him were completely naive about how fast this was going to devolve into a scandal sheet material. And I was Randy Shilts who was who wrote and the band played on and was a great pioneering gay journalist, called me up and asked me if I would talk openly about my friend being gay. And I did it at a time. It still isn't, except it's acceptable. And there were gay people in the Castro, I remember, who sort of cluck their tongues at me when I walked down the street and said, how could anybody say that about a friend? And it was still acutely aware, made me aware that how much self-loathing there was still in our community where that secret has to be protected at all cost.

[00:28:02] And I was worried that I didn't I didn't. You know, when I wrote put I put rock into Tales of the City, his name is a blank. It's a couple of blanks as a Victorian convention. And I didn't. I actually changed people that made it densify it as rock. But when the time came and I realized he was gonna end up in the National Enquirer and somebody had to speak with dignity, I did my best to be that person. And I was afraid I didn't hear he was his life was in turmoil at that point. And I was afraid that somehow I'd come back to him as a my having done a terrible thing. I actually had a friend of his call me up and say to me, how can you do that to this beautiful man? It was a very hard time of my life for that reason. But when he decided that

he was gonna write, he's going to have somebody writer's biography, his autobiography, and hired Sarah Davidson to do it. She came to me and she said, Rock told me that I'm the first.

[00:29:00] You're the first person person I should come to. And I realized that I had been placed there basically for that purpose, to be a member of this new generation that could do this and do it well. And as a consequence, and not just, you know, maybe just because of me. Places like People magazine really did dignified coverage of a gay actor for the first time ever. So anyway, that was a. There are other stories that I could tell you later on when I'm a little drunk. But he was a lovely guy. My memory, my memory, he had a problem with alcohol. Everybody knows that and knows how that can make people change. After a few drinks. But he was a very generous person. I have I always picture him in this long nature and on Rock Hudson. That's one hell of a long night shirt standing in his kitchen, scrambling eggs for the houseguests.

[00:30:01] I had these two different lives, really. You know, this the Hollywood life and the and the gay man that he knew and the little extended family he had with his partner and with the actor George Natur and George's partner, Mark Miller. And he had to keep them apart. And it was I think it was really probably the lay at the core of his alcoholism and a lot of his pain. But he still managed to be kind to people and he was a lovely person.

[00:30:31] Yes.

[00:30:37] I've not been repeating the questions, but I will on that in case people didn't hear it. But basically saying, is there something fundamentally mysterious about San Francisco and has it changed since I started writing about it? I think that is the constant. In San Francisco, I think there is a there's something mystical about it. It always has been to me. It probably always will be. It has something to do with the fact that that fog comes in and it's like a story itself, you know, something is revealed to you and then something comes in in a race, is it? And every time you turn a corner, you get a different view. You have some of that here in Seattle and in its own unique way. It's always been a storyteller's town to me. And I always find it stimulating. And Marianne and Autumn, I got a little Gothic, actually, in terms of it gets quite dark. I realized where he was. It had never really fully addressed the fact that we have a homeless population there. And so I sort of went in into a darker theme in this in this novel. But I though it's it's no accident that those noir films of the late a lot of this noir films of the late 40s were were set in San Francisco. I think it's always been a storyteller's place. Dashiell Hammett stories grew out of the grew out of San Francisco. And I sort of proudly attached myself to that tradition of people who've come there and been affected by it. Mark Twain. The city had an impact on.

[00:32:08] On all those people, yes, you just made your creative profit.

[00:32:25] Though that's not true. I use a vaporizer now, though, it's easier.

[00:32:35] It's a serious question and I'll try to give you a serious answer. I don't write all the time. I'm not a disciplined writer. I'm not. I don't feel the compulsion to write every day. In fact, I feel the compulsion not to write every day and really have to force myself. I will commit when I commit myself to a project and the process starts. Then I do it in the morning. As you know, I write until I can't anymore. I still believe superstitiously that if I go to bed and fall asleep with the story in my head that some of the work will be done while I'm asleep. This is somewhat based on the fact that I did this as a child. I remember reading about self-hypnosis as a child and I had three serials that were running in my head that I would work on as I went to bed. I'd put myself to sleep with these three different stories. One was about a sort of hidden crossroads of two paths in the woods, and another one was a sort of undersea adventure. And that was just been very storytelling in and of itself, had been very much a part of my instinct. And if I can find the story, if I can decide that there's something that I really want to, I can. There's a shivery moment that I can get across to readers then that motivates me to keep working. It's not that I want to be Grace Paley or any number of writers that are idolized because of the beautiful language or whatever. I work on my language a very long time and I I strive for a graceful musical prose. But at the bottom of it, for me, there has to be a story and there has to be suspense.

[00:34:11] Something Wilky Collins, who who wrote serials in the 19th century, said his motto was Make him cry, make them laugh and make him wait. And I really do want to do all of those things. And often in that order, I mean, when people tell me I made them cry. That makes me very happy because it tells me that we had an emotional connection. So that's pretty much it.

[00:34:38] I write when I when. When I know where I'm heading. And I and I try to make myself go at it for as long as I can. I don't get much done. Maybe a page or two a day at the most, sometimes a paragraph. And for that reason, I kind of to be honest, I kind of dread the process when it comes up because I realize, OK, here we are, you get on your knees, you're going to start laying mosaic again, you know, putting down little tiny bits of colored this or that. And you won't get to know what it looks like until you stand up and see it for the first time to stand back from it.

[00:35:20] Yes.

[00:35:35] Well, if you if there's only one book you should read about sports figures.

[00:35:39] What about David Kopay?

[00:35:44] Thank you. And yes, I was just about to brag, if you go to page eleven of sure... view that the tale's novel that came out in 1989, you will see the very moment when Norman, using the name Cliff, comes to the radio to TV station and tries to get an autograph from Mary and she rebuffs him. It's there. It's been under everybody's nose all along. And it's so that's that's a shoe I was waiting to drop for 21 years, I guess. But yes, it's there. It used to be a kind

of kind of front running joke with me and wonderful Stanley DeSantis, who played Norman in the mini series and who loved it.

[00:36:29] It was he considered it the role of his life and it brought him one of the great friendships of his life. Laura Linney, ironically, that the heroine in the villain came to love each other very much well while shooting tales of the city. And and I used to say to him, he'd say, you've got to write me back in. And and I said, but your dad, you fell off a cliff.

[00:36:57] But but I you know, we were often talked about that. And that got me to thinking about it.

[00:37:04] And it felt thematically with Marianne, because Marianne dilemma. throughout the whole serious is she has a very she runs away. She runs away from Cleveland to get some from south San Francisco. She moves in with her old friend, Connie, and she thinks Connie's tacky. She runs away from her. She's constantly. She doesn't connect emotionally with people. She leaves she ends up leaving her husband and her child at the end of the series. You know, I felt this was it would be the ultimate punishment for someone who'd done that. But somebody really off their rocker would come back and say, you don't get to do this anymore.

[00:37:42] Yes, the question is, how much have I been involved in the various adaptations of the work? There were other Richard Kramer wrote the screenplay for Tales of the City for the mini series, the first one.

[00:37:59] I was present. I mean, I did. I did. I did rewriting unofficially. I was credited with co-writing further tales of the city with my friend James Lusane, the guy that created the character Trevor, and then the wonderful Trevor Project that's helping kids so much today. Nicholas Wright wrote the screenplay for the second one. I've always been around and I've always had something to say. And I've always been really lucky because the creative teams I've worked with have wanted to hear what I've had to say. You know, their aim was to recreate what I'd done. And the same is very much true with the musical, the wonderful Jeff Whitty, who got this whole ball rolling, who's from Coos Bay, Oregon.

[00:38:43] Originally was checking me with me at every turn on places that were going and out. And in the case of the musical, especially I it's been so it's amazing. This young team, they're all under 40. There's something about their spirit, just as people themselves that that serves the material. You know, I like them. They're all my friends. They they think very much the way I do. They're all out of the closet. I can't tell you for someone of my generation what a relief that is. You know, when I would tale's the city was published in the, you know, by Harper and Row in those days, not Harper Collins, even Harper and Row back in the late 70s, I had the publicist say, when you come on tour. Could you please not mention the fact that I'm gay? My publicist and I said, well, I can tell your gay on the telephone. And and it's it's a you know, it requires and it's one of the things that I've balked at over the years. It requires your own silence. You're

supposed to be, you know, complicit in someone else's shame. And I that got very old for me very, very, very fast.

[00:40:05] So anyway, I. Yes, or all the way in the back.

[00:40:15] Oh, boy. The first question was easier. What was it? What am I reading? I am reading right now a wonderful book called Remembrance of Things I Forgot by Bob Smith.

[00:40:31] Bob Smith was made history years ago as the as the first openly gay standup comic to appear on The Tonight Show. He had a very sort of homespun, almost Johnny Carson style. He's gone on to become a writer. He wrote a wonderful novel a few years back that call Selfish and perverse and remembrance of Things.

[00:40:55] I figured as a I didn't think I mean, I was frankly, I was resistant because there was a time machine and that made me nervous. But I shouldn't have forgotten the enormous humanity of of Bob's sensibility and its system. It's a beautiful thing. It's very funny. And it actually dissects the Bush years in the most wonderful way. Dick Cheney is a character in it. That's just what he should be reduced to, you know, Boris and Rocky and Bullwinkle. So. It's a lovely book. Very touching, too. And he's getting it. The book is already out. You can find it in bookstores and I'm sure it's on the magic slate thingy thing.

[00:41:51] I've figured out this is the way I'm going to be a grumpy old man, I guess. But we are. But tales of the city, by the way, is on is on as an e-book now. So I'm told that the entire series will be soon. So both ways are good. Both things make people read. Oh.

[00:42:13] Well, the horrible part about that is the longer I put it off, the older she gets.

[00:42:18] And unless I move into the vampire genre, it's it's really about making jokes because it's really hard.

[00:42:29] She's a big piece of me. And in some ways, she's a she represents my own mortality. We have the same initials. You might have noticed and.

[00:42:41] I don't I don't know. I don't know what I want to do. And I've had people that literally say, well, I'll kill you. You kill her and I'll kill you.

[00:42:52] Then I have visions of Annie Wilkes holding me hostage and calling me Mr. Mann and hitting my feet with a sledgehammer.

[00:43:05] It's a Stephen King reference.

[00:43:06] It is amazing how many people really do still come up to writers and say, I'm your number one fan.

[00:43:17] So I don't I don't know. This is where the prequel thing is coming. And people say you don't have to you to kill her off.

[00:43:24] You can go back to when she runs away from the whorehouse. But I've never been able to work in. I mean, I haven't in the past. I've always worked in real time. And I think the best stuff happens because I'm just observing what's going on around me. Thank you. And then kill me.

[00:43:43] Yes.

[00:43:48] Yes, sir.

[00:44:00] I in the case of the case of the Jonestown thing, I actually went back and changed the end of one of the books where Didi is going off to her happy new life with Dorothy and the babies. And she's kissing her mother goodbye. And the last line of that chapter is her mother saying, you know, I don't even know where Guyana is. And you get the big shiver of pho. God, what is she doing that for you? But everything pretty much everything else. I've I've just had to go with what happens. And and very early on, I learned to make my writing my own.

[00:44:40] It gets me out of tight spots. I've written about painful moments of my own life through writing. There's something about containing it on the page and making it into a story that makes it easier. I lost a really close friend named Daniel Katz in 1982 to AIDS. He was one of the first people to die of pneumocystis pneumonia.

[00:45:02] He was this sweet, young, beautiful guy that lived in San Francisco and moved to New York. And he was just gone in an instant. It was it was very, very quick.

[00:45:12] And I I had no way to deal with it. And I wanted everybody else to feel it. And I really looked at my cast of characters and thought this and this instance, who can I who can I take out basically? And I and I wanted it to be Dr. John Fielding, because he was the handsome, perfect guy that was in his worst moments, hung out with a gaze. And. And I remember hearing at the time when AIDS was first happening, well, I'm not gonna get it because I only go to sweater bars like cashmere is the best protector of HIV. And I went and I wanted to say this is this is a virus.

[00:45:58] This isn't about how people live their lives. This isn't connected to shame or even behavior. This is a virus that's traveling around. And I wanted people to feel it. So I he was the he was, you know, in Dickens. It was Little Nell that got everybody upset when he killed off the child. And and I did it offstage. If you remember in Babycakes, it's he's he's dead already. When the story begins and gradually you realize something's terribly wrong.

[00:46:26] And and that was the way I was, that he was the first AIDS fatality in fiction. And you know, the indignation. There were people that wrote The Chronicle and said, you've you've spoiled my light morning entertainment. Gay people who said that who still couldn't stand the thought of being a part of this thing had to keep themselves distance from it. Understandably, it was a time of great, great terror and great heroism. There's a wonderful film out that's about to hit HBO and I think have a feature release, which probably means it will be in Seattle call. We were here. David Weisman directed it. And it's for people who are here today who survived the AIDS epidemic, including a woman caregiver. And it chronicles the whole terror and beauty and majesty and the ways in which we were proving even back then that we did have marriages, we did have families. We did know what love was. And we would, you know, sacrifice everything for it and really try to see it if you can. It's a beautiful, beautiful thing. And it acknowledges, I think, really for the first time in a big way exactly what the women did, because, you know, in those days. Often our separate little corners, the boys and the girls and suddenly women who were not getting sick were stepping forward and taking care of their their dying friends. Yes.

[00:48:08] He said two things he wanted to thank me for Michael's letter to his mother. That was just my letter to my parents.

[00:48:16] I came out of the closet in the course of writing Tales of the City because Anita Bryant had launched her campaign in South Florida. And a lot a lot of people, you know, slight diversion here it was we were at dinner the other night with a much younger gay man. And the Anita Bryant campaign is in the musical. And Michael's Michael's letter to his mother is in the musical. There's something a personal letter I wrote my parents is now a song and a musical.

[00:48:52] And I said, do you know who Anita Bryant was, and he said, wasn't she involved in some sort of a scandal? And I said, What do you mean you said a scandal about a pubic hair on a Coke can?

[00:49:10] Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas and I put it on Facebook and suddenly all these people of my generation, all these young people today, they don't know what I don't know what our history is, but I think I thought, stop, bitch. And that's what she deserves. Nothing more than oblivion. You know?

[00:49:35] So you ask the question at the letter that was actually read that letter at the Castro Theater on a Friday night before the Monday morning, it appeared for the first time in the newspaper to a roomful of my brothers and sisters. And it was a big moment in my life. And the second Mona, Mona is the girl I am. And I'm not being a nice boy.

[00:50:03] I love her.

[00:50:04] I often she would pop up on days when I was writing in the Chronicle, but I just was feeling, you know, the world is fucked. And she was the cynical side of me. Maybe the braver

side of me. Mary Birdsong plays her to a fare thee well in the musical. She's absolutely astonishing. She just knocks the room out. Do you know Mary Birdsong? Oh, cool. So you agree? Good. Mary Mary was in. She was the she. She's the she's the deputy in Reno.

[00:50:40] Nine one one that doesn't seem to know she's the lesbian.

[00:50:50] And if you and I know you'll do this if you go home where you actually you don't. If you start texting right now, I'll kill you.

[00:50:56] But if you're if you want if we do, we're we're over here.

[00:51:02] Google ninety nine cent whore and you will see one of the funniest created characters you can possibly imagine that Mary plays.

[00:51:13] It's she's a kind of trailer trash girl trying to do a video and can't quite look at the camera and and she works at the 99 cent store. There's a whole series of them. I promise you you'll be amused all night long. She's a brilliant character actor and can do anything. So, yes. That's the word you got at the library today. Go home and Google 99 cent whore.

[00:51:42] Yes. Way in the back there.

[00:51:51] She. Well, we are similar in that I've tried to emulate her, too. I think of her as my better spirit. I'm not there. Most of the time. But there's something in me that knows what the right how to behave. And and that came from my grandmother.

[00:52:10] I had an English grandmother that was very much a force in my life when I was a little boy. And growing up in this very conservative Southern household with a lot of racism and you name it being taught as a matter of course. And she was this free spirit. She had been a suffragist in England, made speeches for women's rights.

[00:52:33] I didn't find out until I was well into my forties and was on tour in England that she was never married to my grandfather. She apparently got pregnant with my mother and they had to leave England. And he left a wife and five children back in England. He was 30 years her senior. Not that there's anything wrong with that. And they moved to Asheville, North Carolina.

[00:53:05] And he promptly died because he was an old man and she raised these kids and amazingly, she sold sandwiches by the side of the road at the beginning and then she taught elocution to people at the Virginia Theological Seminary. And I just a daughter, she read my poem when I was a little kid. She was this free, loving spirit. And I remember one time when I was 14 and we were walking together to a garden party in Raleigh. And there was a woman in front of us who at the time would have been described as a Joey Heatherton type, which means all pink and blond and tottering along on spike heels and and a big cloud of perfume.

[00:53:46] And my grandmother turned to me, who was very star stylish lady. She wore these big picture hats, as she called them, an often beige. And and she turned to me. And after looking at this woman and said, any woman who is all woman or any man who is all man is a complete monster unfit for human company.

[00:54:11] And it was a revolutionary thing to hear in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1958. It still is.

[00:54:19] By the way, there are a lot of her went into Mrs. Madrigal.

[00:54:27] Yes, with Harvey.

[00:54:33] I knew him and we often did gigs together. You know, when there were fundraisers and things, we were together. I wasn't part of his political organization, not because I voted for him, but I was in the film, pretty much defined his little circle of friends. And I knew him and all of those people. And I'm really happy that the movie caught all of him because he was such a wonderful launches. You know, sexual fun loving guy. You know, he was sort of a part Borscht Belt comic in a, you know, a Sader. He was. It was amazing and but very clever because he knew how to politically how to put everybody together. When they started focusing endlessly on the fact that he was gay, he went out and did the anti-dog shit law. And and he brought me someone wonderful. He was with a young man the last month of his life. He was I think they were in love with each other. I'm Steve.

[00:55:37] And Steve basically showed up at work one day where everybody knew that he was sleeping with Harvey and and looked around and everybody had these terrible expressions on their face. And his boss pulled him aside and said, I want to drive you home. And he says he walked all the way to city hall where there were people weeping in the street because the assassination happened that morning. And Steve came to the memorial service and I was sitting in one of the front rows there at the Opera House. And there was an empty seat next to me. And he said, May I sit with you? And I felt so bad for him that I held his hand through the thing, even though, I mean, I didn't know him. And then a couple weeks later, we met on the street and we became fast friends. And we were best friends for 15 years. Really great, great friends. We traveled together and he was an activist and a writer and was sweet, bright spirit.

[00:56:42] You will watch.

[00:56:44] Oh, yes.

[00:56:48] Chris, I'll tell you why people listen.

[00:56:52] Like, I remember my grandmother, the one who read Palms, she'd be on a bus or something, she'd fall out of receipt. She was so busy trying to read somebodies palm.



[00:57:08] I saw you first, so I'll tell you what I would love most to hear.

[00:57:16] And I do hear fairly often from young people is that it's like their lives. Which tells me I was on the right track to begin with because that's all I was really trying to do. It's irrelevant to me whether it's a period piece, almost everything's a period piece eventually, but whether or not they can relate to the you know, to the longing and the love. The search for love and family. And tell me that it's you know, they feel the same thing. And that's there's no better compliment to be paid, really, because that's when the word timeless comes into play. I think they can read it and not really care that it's ancient history.

[00:58:00] I mean, it just blows me away. Sometimes I think, oh, my God, they must see me the way I used to see P.G. Woodhouse when I was young.

[00:58:09] That sort of m.a Noel Coward at.

[00:58:18] I should be so lucky, really. But thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

[00:58:31] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

