



Library podcast

2013 Seattle Reads 'Stories for Boys': Meet Author Gregory Martin

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We are grateful to all of our Seattle reads sponsors, but let me just mention a couple especially Hawthorne books small independent, press in Portland, Oregon. When all the other Publishers said no to Greg's manuscript Rhonda Hughes. The publisher said yes, and I'm only sorry that she's not here to really feel and see and hear our appreciation for that. I say not that she was Braves particularly, but that she was really smart. So thanks, especially to Hawthorne books. Also to Elliott Babel company our longtime partner in the project. Karen almond is here today with both of Gregory. Martin's book Greg. I can't see Gregory year Greg Martin's books and other things from our suggested reading list and some titles that she has pulled herself and then finally and most importantly the Seattle Public Library Foundation. It's thousands of people who make gifts large and small to benefit our libraries. All right, so it is my great pleasure to welcome Greg Martin to the honor lost count of how many

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they five and the final public event for Seattle reads. So Greg's first book Mountain City won the 2001 Washington State book award. That was when I first met Greg and his writing This many years later to see what's come. It's it's pretty wonderful. So while living in Seattle 1998 to 2001 Greg taught at North Seattle and Seattle Central Community colleges and Seattle University. He currently lives in Albuquerque with his family where he's on the faculty of the University of New Mexico teaches creative writing. So today Greg's going to make some brief remarks and he's going to read you a brief Passage. Judge, and then he's going to invite you to ask any questions that you have about anything. Right. Okay, so please help me welcome Greg Martin to the Seattle Public Library.

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Hi, how's it going? So I'm super happy to be here my friends from North Seattle Community College or here Carolyn Lord is here as my one of my bosses at the loft is here and walking out the door

when I walked in this woman said to me my dad was in one of your classes and he said to say hello and and so I've never seen her before but I guess her dad was in my class and then last night this young man came up to me and he looked like he was my age. And he said I was your student 13 years ago. And so I must have been his teacher when I was about I know 11.

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It's really wonderful to be in Seattle. It's wonderful to be at this beautiful Branch. I have lost track of how many beautiful public libraries I've been to in the last five days. It is an amazing thing that you have going here with the Seattle Public Library and was Seattle Reads. This is a dream come true. I'm still pinching myself about having this happen to me. I am so grateful to Elliot Bay bookstore and to Karen who's come out to so many of these events selling books and to the other people from University of Washington bookstore and Third Place Books. I'm grateful to the Seattle Public Library foundation and to all the donors to the book at Repertory Theater. I'd never seen one of those book it Productions before and it blew me away. It was phenomenal and so if you've seen On you know what I'm talking about. And if you haven't then you should run don't walk because it's really wonderful and I have to say just Chris Agha she is such a wonderful human being and work. So tirelessly

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on my behalf on behalf of my book and for all of you in Seattle, so I'd like to give her a round of applause for foot.

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It's true that you get to ask anything after I'm done reading for a little bit and we'll talk about whatever comes up. There's been a lot of emoting. It's true. This is in some ways a very painful book, especially at the front end but maybe even all the way through so I've I've read some tough stuff at the different readings and I'm kind of in the mood for not reading some tough stuff. You've already read the book. Most of you. I kind of want to read my favorite passage from the Look and I've set myself this personal challenge to read something new each time. So that Chris doesn't have to hear the same thing over and over. So this is from the middle of the book and this is a section and it's called The Way We Were if you have your book and you want to read along it's on page 159. That's about a refrigerator. All right. Here we go. Evan is wandering the house in a funk. He's not himself. He's not running from the front door to the hallway and back gesturing talking to himself narrating singing

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daydreaming and motion Evan comes into the kitchen and stands there looking lost. Christine says, what's the matter sweetheart Evan sighs. I miss our old refrigerator. I know Christine says change is really hard you wish that things could have stayed the same don't you I never asked for this new fancy refrigerator. I liked our old one better. I knew exactly how Evan felt. During the Endless Summer of the Cooney Martin kitchen remodel our small 1970s white refrigerator, which came with the house when we bought it was relocated to the living room along with the kitchen table and the microwave oven like this. It was like camping in your own living room with your own refrigerator. But then one day when he came home from a friend's house, there was a brand spanking new stainless

steel Whirlpool Gold energy star Drawer freezer refrigerator in the kitchen and the old white refrigerator was out by the curb. Evans struggled with this he how Wild he held a vigil lasting into the dark of evening and

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past bedtime out on the curb beside the old refrigerator. He crumpled the free sign Christine had taped on the refrigerator and threw the ball of paper in the middle of the street. The next morning Evan woke up and went outside and sat beside the refrigerator and his yellow Sponge Bob pajamas. He brought out his collapsible Buzz Lightyear lawn chair and set it on the sidewalk. It was a sit in a nonviolent protest that could only make his mother proud, even though she hated the old white refrigerator, which I thought was perfectly fine. She loved her new stainless steel refrigerator more at that particular time. Perhaps still then she loved me.

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People passing by slowly in their cars stopped to look at the old white beloved refrigerator. Hi there. They said sweetly to Evan. Are you giving away your refrigerator? No, Evan snarled. You can't have it. The people drove away Mark walked over he had a daughter in high school and was unmoved by Evans unhappiness. He wanted the refrigerator. He could come get it right now. He had his own hand truck but rarely had such a fine occasion to put it to use he could just wheel the refrigerator down the street Evan watched this conversation transpire with growing disbelief. Hey Evan, I said marks the one who gave us the yellow slide for the Treehouse tears were streaming down Evans face. He hopped up and down his whole face turned red. He was crying his hardest giving his full effort, which is all you can really ask for. Mark said Evan wait stop. Listen, I have a deal for you. He had to say this a few times before Evan could hear over the Tantrum. He was throwing finally Evans stopped his fists

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balled at his side. What if Mark said I just borrow the refrigerator from you since you don't have room for it anymore. I'll borrow it and keep it in my garage and that way I can put beer and soda and stuff in there for me, but I'll always keep a few juice boxes in there for you and you can come down and visit your refrigerator anytime you want. You'll just come over and say hey Mark. How's my refrigerator doing and I'll say just great Evan you want to juice box? I've been keeping one cold for you. And then you can have one if your mom and dad say it's okay. How does that sound? A smile slowly emerged on Evans face this smile grew wider then Evan jumped up and raised his fist in Victory. He shouted yeah Mark looked at me. I said sure I can come visit my refrigerator. I haven't said any time and you can have a juice box. When you visit Mark added. You can come down for a juice box later today. It won't take me long to get it all set up. Okay. Okay, having said yes, okay, he wiped his tear-stained

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cheeks with the backs of his hands and wipe them on his shirt. He grinned mischievously. Can my dad have one of your beers? He can oven there's got to be some kind of game on you could both come in for a while and watch TV. Awesome. Evan said he wandered off to play with his toys. He didn't even watch the refrigerator roll down the street. Thanks.

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It's warm in Seattle in May. I don't remember this. Yeah, it's kind of nice. I might wander around and hand the microphone to people like a talk show host. thoughts comments question idle speculation

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Everybody needs a mark. Yeah. I'm lucky. I live in a neighborhood where I have a bunch of them. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

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He was for one my dad attempted suicide and at that point in the book. He was five to five ish. Let's say in there somewhere. Yeah. Yeah the dog which dog my dog or my mom's dog. Okay, because my mom said that she was going to file a lawsuit against me for character defamation of her dog. Yeah. I like Rocky a lot. He couldn't make it but In the boys are here in Seattle with me and they have jumped into Lake Washington. They've jumped into Green Lake. They've also jumped into the water down at Golden Gardens, and I'm not sure which waters they've jumped into today. Yeah, but they're here Rocky couldn't make it but I'll send him your regards. Yes. Sure. The question is could I talk about how my family members have reacted to the book.

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It's different for every one of them. My parents have been incredibly supportive. I think that for my mom reading the initial drafts were really painful for her but I had sent her drafts of the book before I sent it out for publication and said this is going to be hard, but would you read it and help me make it better and and she did but what she had said to me at the time was that it was like ripping off a scab that had just healed and having it bleed all over again,

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but then she also really loves my mom loves excellence and she's an intense lady and so once she got through the emotional part, she was really like well maybe you should Extend this scene and how about this characterization? And then she had all kinds of feedback, you know, which was great and some I regarded in some I just let go my dad. I did the same thing with my dad and he was wonderful. He sent me back all kinds of comments in the margins. He was like I learned how to use that track changes feature and Microsoft Word, but it wasn't nearly as hard for him. I can tell you that because he knew the whole story. I'm didn't and so even reading my draft my mom learned things from me about my dad that he had told me but never told her but for my dad he knew all of those things and so it wasn't nearly as difficult. Yeah. Yeah right here. And I you know, it's funny. I was in West Seattle this morning, but it's not I was at the South West Branch. It wasn't really West Seattle as Pat was what

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I thought to be West Seattle, but the people there didn't think that they were in West Seattle. They thought that they were in a different place and one person said like something would and then someone said something else but it was the southwest branch and I read that passage this morning partly out of my gratitude for libraries. I was one of those kids that grew up going to my public library

and sitting down, On at the paperback rack that kind of Twirls around and just spending the whole afternoon and then checking out a ton of books and then walking home with both hands down here and then my chin holding down the top book as I walked home through the neighborhood. That was the kind of kid. I was but you know, what? What's interesting about that is that I did in many different ways get permission people were like, hey, you're good at this. You should keep writing go do this and that happened to me throughout my childhood. Childhood and middle school high school Beyond in college, but

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that whole theme right of how difficult it is to be who you are has everything to do with the book not just acceptance of others being who they are, but for my father how difficult it was for him his whole life right to be who he is. Yeah. Thank you. So back on the theme of family members responding we were we This for a book club and we're discussing how the book is your filter of your father. You know, I mean, it's your experience of finding out about your father and everything and and there's lots to talk about about that. But specifically you mentioned having a brother and yet he's not in there. So maybe he chose to just not be part of the story or Yeah, so no no. No, you're not prying at all. Remember everything's fair game. So what about my brother? And what about his take? His stock line is that his life goal is to never do anything that would land him as a character in one of my books. Yeah, my brother doesn't want to be a character in one of my books that's his goal. But more seriously,

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I wanted us all to focus on my relationship with my father and my relationship with my son's and my brother has a very different relationship with both my mom and my dad he also has a son who's six months older than my oldest son and he had handled this Revelation with his I'm very differently then then I was handling with my kids and so I'm I have this belief about writing that the book gain strength by what you leave out and what you gain what rather than having breath and having you have like just an idea of how this is affecting all of these characters. I'm going to try to get you as to care as much as possible about these characters that I choose. There's this Great quote that I love it's kind of a guiding quote by Georgia O'Keeffe. And she says that nothing is less real than realism. It's only by selection elimination and emphasis that we get at the real nature of things. And so we only have, you know, 250 pages together and I want those 250 pages to be to go as deep as I can. And

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so if I take you over here and start discussing Sing with you how my brother is handling this with his son and how it's very different then. I'm kind of already tracking away from what I want to focus on the most but what I will say is that my brother to his great credit is not an existential interrogator of my dad like me, you know, my brother has been really consistently loving to my dad accepting to my dad but were wanting to know all kinds of different things from him doesn't want to ask those questions necessarily doesn't want to hear the answers for his own reasons. But what he does instead is he calls my dad just about every 3 days and says things like hey, how you doing? How was work today? And you'll say what are you reading? And he'll that my dad talked about that where I'm like, I don't

want to know any more about your science fiction book tell me about you know, right you read about that. And so and what that does is my dad just has someone checking in on him regularly. That's

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essentially saying I love you what's going on and that's harder for me and my dad although I think we're there now more so but my brother has always handled that very differently and I am just unfortunately. fortunately the child that I am the brother that I am and so I felt like if I started tracking that way then that would make me think well then I'm already trying to figure out the balance of characterization between my father and mother and how much to include her or not much less my wife and my kids and so I just had to make some decisions about how much because I'm kind of this the kind of author that it feels like I as a like imagine I'm of this kind of grunge band downtown. I want to stop playing music before you get ready to leave. And so I like compression and I like economy. And so I didn't want to drag on past the point of which I felt like I could speak with Force. Yeah over here. I'm going to bring the microphone over to you. And then I'm going to bring it over here. Okay,

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great. I read recently in the can't remember where and who but it was struck me that what I think happened in a given incident. Is maybe what I told my wife and it's not necessarily what happened, but that's now I'm sure everybody's had the experience of telling a story a number of times and it can be like the fish story. You know, everybody knows the fish story, right the one that got away and well what I want to know is not is not that but I want to know about your psychological makeup in terms of Of during the writing of the book. Do you think it changed your acceptance by writing? So thank you. The initial comment is that there is a line in my book actually where I talk about how we remember best not what we experience but what we say about what we experience and there's all these social. Geological studies about that about how stories burn the memory that are very different than the men than the actual experience. And the more you tell the story the further away you get from the experience,

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but the experience is gone. Once it happens and whatever record happens of that experience is not the experience. There's never a transcription. and there's a wonderful novelist memoirist William Maxwell and he has a book that I love dearly and it's called so long see you tomorrow and he says when we talk about the past we lie with every breath we take Huh, you just write a memoir about the past. Mmm. So I do believe that's true. But I also believe that that's the convention that we all enter together. You know that this is a memoir. It's not journalism. It's the story that memory has to tell we also know no one is surprised when they hear that memories fallible. So we all know that too and so to the second part of your comment In question, how did this change me in the writing of it? I am of the belief through experience and also through teaching writing for a really long time that my writing is a lot smarter than I am. It's wiser. It's smarter. It's more insightful if you catch me on

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the street and asked me about something. It's probably not it's probably pretty half-baked. But if I have to ride it and stay with it for months and then revise and weigh in again after I get feedback from

someone else the final thing that I end up with is probably smarter in that moment than I am and I would stand beside it. And so I think that there's a lot more insight in the book because I ended up writing the book then I had before I started and that's I think that's true whether you're writing Memoir or fiction or poetry or Things but what I would add to that is that I did not write it as therapy. I wrote it as a work of art to offer to you and to readers in Poughkeepsie and Des Moines and you know places that I'll never go and people I'll never meet and so while at the same time I what I did have Solace from writing this book and I did reach insights that I would not have otherwise arrived and I do think that At it deepened my compassion self-understanding. That's not why I wrote

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it. I wrote it because I love books. I want to participate in the tradition of books. There's a great salad Belk Al Saul Bellow quote where he says a writer is a reader moved to emulation and I wanted to write a book that could sit beside William Maxwell so long see you tomorrow and have a conversation with it and participate in that tradition. And so I had to manage Things that someone that's writing to feel better. They don't have to manage. I wanted to manage short and long arcs of suspense. I wanted to manage characterization. I wanted to manage how much of my brother do I tell you. What do I leave completely out that you'll never know about. So there's this paradoxical relationship that the writer always has with the reader and the writer says every single thing that I'm going to tell you you need to know. and on the flip side of that is that if I don't tell you you don't need to know those are the two sides kind of of the same coin and so Yes, I wrote it and I received all kinds of

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insights. But I really wrote it to try to make this thing that would stand completely self-contained away from me. Yeah, and then there was where was the net right here. You have the next thing I'm going to hand it. They little section about Evan and the soccer game because I had an Evan. I haven't even also and I wondered in your parenting. I guess I could feel your little bit competitive and and right right right and that's why you were giving that child. How's it going in your parenting? Yeah. So yeah Evans definitely my teacher, right and those of you that have parented kids, you know that like I am one of these people that has Afflicted with the desire not just to win but to like dominate an opponent like How can I send them home feeling awful about themselves and then I have to realize that that's not the person that I want to be and so I actually don't really compete at all anymore about anything. You know, I kind of ride my bike. I go for a swam or I go for a run by myself because

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that part of me that so competitive is not the healthiest and Evan isn't like that at all and either really is Oliver and my dad wasn't like that. You're right Evan and just turned ten and he loves playing with his friends and he loves running around the neighborhood with his friends. He loves. We just had some people in from out of town and they just found a way to walk the walls of all the different Albuquerque has all these stucco walls instead of fences. And so if you're Savvy you can navigate the whole neighborhood going wall the wall through all these different backyards and I happen to live in a wonderful neighborhood where we know the walls that the Kids can walk and the ones that they probably shouldn't and then they sometimes guac the walls that they shouldn't and then they walk the

walk he loves that that to him is really fun. And so he's doing really wonderful. He doesn't play soccer anymore. I don't coach soccer anymore or ref anymore. And when we watch TV all they want sports

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on TV. They just want to watch the commercials. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, so over here and then to here. Well, first of all, I really really liked the passage that you that you read. I thought it was a brilliant illustration of how easy it is for children to become seriously emotional about change and yet if you're they're given a an Avenue through which they that they can change and transition that they're comfortable. That and then they can just move on so so I thought that was a brilliant illustration of that. My question is is you I thought that you spent knowing that what least from what you said that you have a number of gay relationships in your life and that you really took a long time to tell your kids what the issue what the issue was and I was wondering whether you in hindsight felt like you took that long because you really thought your kids couldn't take it or whether it was because you couldn't tell them.

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So if it were up to me, I would have told them two weeks into the whole thing, but I probably wouldn't have handled it very well. I would have told them and I would have been full of pain and I think what ended up happening is that we waited until 11 was about six and a half until we told them and he's still as you know from the book, you know is like this. Me is the part that's gay. And he's rubbing his arm. I'm a quarter gay. You're a half gay still didn't get it. But then he got it the next day and the next day it took a few days and it still is interesting. We still talk about this stuff all the time. And I think that the thing that I was most afraid of was that first conversation and trying to figure out how to have that conversation and feel like Christine felt supportive of that conversation. She wanted to have that conversation too, but she just didn't want them. She wanted them to be able to take it in the right way. My my wife sister is a lesbian. She has a partner they Had a

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baby so and this has Evan has known Momo and an we call Molly Momo since the day was born in as a lesbian and out. And so what was difficult for me was untangling all the things to tell and not tell so I didn't want to tell them about suicide although Oliver found out from reading this magazine piece that I wrote I didn't Want to tell them about incest and neither one of them know about that now and so trying to balance like what do you tell children? What do they need to know? And what do they not need to know to protect their innocence was the conflict for me, but I wanted them when their grandfather came to visit to know that he was gay. That was okay. Not just okay, but good and Kitt hits look at what's going on in the country understand that in the context of marriage equality understand that in the context of the suicides that they would hear about because we're talking about them at the dinner table. And so it wasn't too much longer after we did have that conversation that that commercial

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came on for the it gets better project. The Trevor Project and Dan Savage is on the NBA Playoffs commercial and so by that time it had only been a few weeks and haven't really understood. So but I

also wouldn't want to say that I handled that whole process with tremendous Grace and Poise as you know from reading the book. I wanted to show you the process that someone goes through when you drop them down in crisis. I wanted to show you what it was like for me to have to struggle after being a father for so long to have to be a child. Again in a way and be feeling hurt and betrayed like a child might and recover from that. And so I think that the one of the things that the Memoirs does is that they invite you to see what they really went through with as much candy as possible and if I implicate myself make myself as vulnerable as I possibly can then you can see yourself and you can see your own scenarios that you've gone through and what Wonder how did I handle that? How would I have handled

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what he went through so that the book becomes this kind of like situational ethics that we all participate in and you have to make the meaning of the book just right along with me. Yeah, and then here and then over here. What I wondered is now that the book is out how has it or will it affect your father in this small town that he lives in where he doesn't want people to know that he's gay has it changed his life. Or have such as been read enough down there. Well, um, I don't think Kingman Arizona has an Elliott Bay Book Company.

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That's the first thing I would say, there isn't the kind of reading Community there and my dad does live on the edge of the Mojave Desert about 15 miles north of town and just like a handful of houses and it's true that he does not want a ton of people to know about this, but he also isn't afraid of it. He says things like well if someone comes up to me and they say that they read the book in town someone I work with. Okay, and so I'll tell you my dad and I went to my son's middle school fall Fiesta in October of this year. And one of my friends whose son goes to the same school as my son had read the book and had already told me that he really liked it and he had a really difficult childhood with a very difficult father and the book meant a lot to him and he came up to me and said hey, how's it going? And I introduced my dad to him and he turned to my dad and he said hey, my name is Randy. Read your son's book and it was beautiful and so moving and thank you so much for letting that book

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be in the world. I think it's going to do a lot of good and my dad's shook his hand and the two of them walked over and sat at a picnic table and they talked for like 25 minutes. So even though my dad isn't out and proud in Kingman, Arizona, he's proud of this book. He knows what I'm doing here. I invited him and he was like, I don't think I'll come to the Northeast branch. But I send him emails and I get emails almost lately. I've been getting a couple of week but since the book was published back in October. I got a lot of emails and I will forward them to him. And so I got an email from a man that had been just walking through his book store in Greenwich Village picked up the book didn't know what it was about. Said this books for me took it home read it and like two and a half days and emailed me and his father had attempted and succeeded in committing suicide 40 years ago, and he had been closeted gay and the book really helped him and he emailed me and I emailed back and we've had

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this wonderful email correspondence turns out he's gay. He also attempted suicide survived and is Greg Louganis is biographer. Has written a number of books and he took the time out to thank me. When really I should be thanking him. I just didn't know to thank him. I sent that along to my dad and my dad was like tell him thanks and there's been a lot of those kinds of stories. And so I think that there's a lot of ways for my father to feel good about what he and I have done by getting this book in the world and I'm grateful to him, but the progress that I have made kind of personally is to Do not demand anything more from him than where he wants exactly to be. Yeah, then over here. This is on that theme of think you said existential interrogation. So I'm of your parents generation and I would say that as good as we may be at keeping secrets my parents generation at this point now my mom's generation is way better for better for worse and also, For example, my mom is 89 and there's so many

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things I want to know and so I just wondered if you would speak a little about the sort of the the the tension between the pain that asking my cause the your elders versus the pain of just wondering and knowing you may never know. What a great question the first thing I would say. Is that I am certainly no expert and I don't think my book is a roadmap.

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You know, so I'm just going to weigh in is just like one of you I should go sit over there somewhere

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my dad and I love each other and I knew that when I wrote this book that he would be okay with it. And when I sent it to him and asked him to read about it, I really worried about his response and he when I asked him after he had read the full. Raft like what do you think? Is it? Okay if I put this in the world he said son, this is yours. You made this. It's beautiful. And so I knew that going in on some level and I also knew that about my mom. and so I knew that they would tolerate my existential interrogations because they've always tolerated me to the best degree that they could

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and so I think that that's part of the equation that's deeply context-specific and I think that I said to them in a pretty non-threatening way I'd like you to read this and help me make this Not like I'd like you to read this but I you can't tell me what to publish and not I just didn't go about it that way. But even in just asking the question for things that you want to know you have to I mean, we all know that even if you say it in the most perfect way, it might not be received well and you can't control how it's going to be received. But what I would say is that what I've learned is that you get through that initial pain that your terribly afraid of And it is painful and it's is actually as painful as you imagine it to be for you and for the other person and then you wake up the next morning and you have more to talk about that's been my experience, you know, but I don't know that that would be the exact same experience for everybody. Yeah. Right here in front how difficult is it to

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tell the truth to watch yourself writing this and know that you are telling it the way it was or do you give yourself some Liberty to make some changes? And is that an at what kind of a struggle is that? That's a great question how difficult it is to tell the truth any Liberties. Did I give myself Liberty going to give myself any Liberties none. And I mean what I would say is that is the dialogue that I render from when I'm ten years old accurate. Well, it's that's invention. That's memory. But I have a great in-house editor named Christine with a really strong bullshit detector.

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I have a brother that read the whole draft. I have my parents who read the whole draft all the principal players got to weigh in and I think the truth well told is better than just about anything you can make. In a memoir, I mean a novel is got completely different terrain and a different contract with the reader, but too many Memoirs have broken the contract with the reader when we find out later that like this or that didn't happen and we're really betrayed and pissed and rightly. So and so that the past 10 years of the publishing history of the Memoir informed my writing and all kinds of ways, but I kind of already was there. and so

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I just didn't think that there was anything I could invent there was more complex intricate compelling and full of conflict than actually what happened and I also felt like even though my First Book Mountain City is a very very different book, even though it is a memoir. It's really A Memoir of place and I get to be this kind of Observer and a minor character in a way of my aunt and uncle story my grandparents story the story of this town and it was My preference at the time to write like that. Absolutely. I didn't have to put all of myself on the line and this book didn't I couldn't do that for this book. It required something different from me and in part because my father as much as he did give me he also withheld so much and so I didn't have tremendous amounts of material about his inner life that I could share with you he would Have to write that book. So I found myself in the position of being a pretty reluctant protagonist at first, but the more I wrote the more I felt like the only

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way that they're going to buy any of this is if I have to be a credible complex flawed character. And so that was hard people kept saying and I always say this as a teacher of writing I need to know more about you tell me more about you and often the beginning writer in the early drafts. They characterize everything well, but themselves So I had to learn that and that was difficult, but it wasn't difficult like in terms of personal revelation as much as it was difficult in terms of craft. How do you how do you characterize yourself? How do you see yourself with empathy and compassion and Clear Sight and not self-loathing or not to try to portray yourself as the hero that was hard. Yeah and right here.

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Are you keeping a journal and we're using a tape recorder some of these things, you know where you have direct quotations was I keeping a journal was I using a tape recorder. I write everything down if I want to remember something I write it on my hand. I write it on my Southwest ticket. I write it on a movie ticket stub. I write it on I have so many books that I'm reading and there's all this stuff in the margins that has nothing to do with that book. If you picked up books that I've read. It's not like

clothes. Reading annotations of that book Moby Dick, it's more like what happened to me at lunch in the margins that I don't want to forget. And so I don't have any faith in memory of something happens to me today and I want to remember it tomorrow and I don't write it down. It's going to be tremendously vague. But if I write it down, I you know, I usually if I jot down words phrases ideas dialogue. I can usually conjure it back up, but I would say this in many ways. Ways dramatically the

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Memoir as a genre is much closer to the novel than it is to Omnivore's Dilemma or name your book of investigative Repertory real journalism. It is aiming at an emotional truth that needs to be built. Rather than factual truth expository truth expository insight. And so if we were to look together at the scene that I constructed about the argument that I get in with my dad in which he says, I want you completely out of my life. I never want to talk to you again and he hangs up and I'm sitting there if we went back through that dialogue and looked how much of that is exactly true as it. And we wondered that and then we actually have the satellite stream of that moment what it line up. It would line up emotionally almost exactly but word for word phrase for phrase. I'm not as interested in that as I'm interested in communicating to you where they're mourning doves kind of like that. I can hear on the telephone wires. Well, they are almost every day, you know was the sunset going down just

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like that. Well it often is like that at that time the kids were banging on the window thinking like what's dad mad about Christine pull them away to take them to the park. So

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I don't want to dodge the question of about truth. But the aim is emotional truth rather than a transcription of an event. Yeah other folks. Yeah back here. Am I working on something else? Yeah, sort of. I have two minds about that. There's a Richard Ford essay that I really liked and he it's called goofing. an off while the muse recharges And he says that whenever he finishes a book he watches a lot of sports and daytime TV. And I don't really watch daytime TV. I like sports but I also I'm not in a hurry as an artist. My hero is like Wendell Berry, you know, like I want to be 75 and putting a book out every three to five years or trying and so

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I had an essay that I published this past year while this book was kind of waiting to come out and that essay was about pediatric hospice. Tough subject and I went out to family in which a ten-year-old girl had refused life-sustaining surgery for a tracheotomy because she had been through surgery after surgery after surgery and every single time. It seemed like she came this close to dying and her family didn't want to do it anymore. Even though this surgery compared to the other kind of spinal fusions and titanium rods surgeries that she'd been through were much harder. I wrote an essay about that and here's what I found. And I found that I loved how high the stakes were in that story. And I really loved thinking about the Health Care System writing about children writing from the vantage point of the parent, but I really also liked not having to write about my experience but having to put the lens on some other other thing and so there are books that are like the article that I wrote.

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I don't know if any of you have read the spirit catches you and you fall. Fall down that's one of my favorite books. And and so I've been taking notes. I'm around a lot of folks at the medical school in Albuquerque about stories like that, but I'm not writing sentences and paragraphs about that yet. It's still kind of percolating. So I have promised my family that this next book it won't be about them and they're happy about that. Yeah. Yeah way in the back. This is kind of a personal question but have your mother and father talk to each other. Have they become friendly again? Sometimes after a breakup, you know any time there needs to be a little bit of a cooling off period and then they can become friends again. So the question is of my mother and father. Are they talking again? Are they friends? Again? My dad was visiting us in Albuquerque this past weekend. It was Evans 10th birthday, and and he said to me it's been six years. Do you think she'll talk to me? and I said, I don't know

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and the child and me would like that to happen, but

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it's okay. I I also I really admire my mom for her position of you know. Saying that this is what I need to move on. And I think that most people that read the book put themselves in that position and say what would I do 39 years of marriage ended by a suicide attempt and another another reader ask me a really good question that was similar vein in which you know, she said has your mother forgiven your father. I don't know the answer to that either. Either I know I have and I tried to make a record of that in a way but as much as I also feel like I don't want my father to be anywhere other than he is. I try to feel that exact same way about my mom. And it's hard because there's a part of me that is just like Evan. I just want it to be back the way it was. It was pretty beautiful the way it was for my limited Vantage Point. Yeah over here. Yeah. I got a lot out of your chapters, which you discussed condiment Kahneman and and Gilbert I'd read both books, but I but they're really added to

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my understanding go. Of that and particularly got benefit from the chapter on hypotheticals, but I hadn't heard anything about the book before and when I was reading I was really thrown off by two things the first one you talked about your younger child falling off the bed. I thought I was going to be reading about a child who was crippled or something and the second one you talked about your father having Affairs those weren't Affairs that were encounters and it's a Different thing when you have a when you're intrigued by somebody as opposed to having Intrigue in which you hide from somebody else. I was only if that was intentional or or not. So I'll take those one at a time. So the that was excellent. Thank you. First idea. Is that that you really liked the sections by Daniel Kahneman? Who is a Nobel Laureate economic Economist who's done? All of Of this social science about decision-making and happiness and Daniel Gilbert's book about affective forecasting and I'm glad that you like

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those I wanted to show you in a way not just this happened and then this happened and this happened in terms of my relationship with my father, but I also wanted to show you that I was kind of going and trying to read anything I could that might help me understand choices Secret Lives. Hiding those kinds of things and so I'm glad you responded to those. I also felt like that those gave us an opportunity to come up for air in the same way that the comic section is let the reader come up for air and that then we can move from kind of like an emotional understanding to more of a kind of intellectual understanding put it in a kind of different kind of context. So I'm glad that that worked for you about the about the opening section of the book. It's interesting that you thought that like falling off the bed Landing Evan landing on his head might be like this book about this kid that gets brain damaged because of wrestling what I wanted to open the book with was a healthy masculine father-son

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relationship where we're pretty much naked. And things are excellent. They are as they should be in a book about a father that didn't have that relationship with his own father. In fact, it was as awful as one could possibly imagine and in which I was trying to understand my own father better. So that was in terms of what my understand craft understanding of that the beginning tries to shape the expectations. I understand from you that that didn't work, but I was aiming for this other thing in terms of Of the next point about Affairs versus encounters. I like that. I wish that you'd been talking to me like three years ago because like you're right. They were a I mean they were Anonymous encounters. They weren't Affairs. There was a really common in a that I really took to heart in a similar vein by a woman out Columbia City a few days ago in which she said do you really? We think that those were betrayals of your mom because I can see that he wasn't trying to replace your mom with someone

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younger someone more. You know, he wasn't that relationship was perfect for him. Wonderful for him that this was really very different in character and kind and that maybe betrayal is isn't the right word and I liked thinking about that and I think that's very valid and I think that Trail seen from someone outside perspective might not be the right word betrayal from my father's perspective might not be the right word. But betrayal from my mother's perspective was the right word and maybe she could get to a different word with a different perspective. But that would require quite a lot of internal Reckoning and compassion that maybe she doesn't want to do maybe she doesn't need to do and I'm certainly not going to try to get her to do that. But but yeah point taken Yeah, I completely agree way in the back and then right here. Thanks, many of your chapters could be essays that Standalone have they in fact have any been published alone in the New Yorker? What have you second have either of

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your kids read a chapter or two or had them read to them. The refrigerator one seems G-rated in a yeah, great question. So

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about two-thirds of the way through the book. This is a prescient question because when we came And you said to me I really like what I've read so far and later on in the book. You're going to find that

I did publish an essay called the family plot in a magazine called the sun. I was really proud of that essay and it gave me a lot of confidence to write the whole story because I got a lot of great feedback from people about it and my son Oliver was rifling through the magazine rack and next to our bed and found it pulled it out. Out started reading it and was like, what's this about Grandpa attempting suicide? So we had to explain that to him as best. We could we fumbled that one too. Particularly. I fumbled it but

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I did excerpt that one piece in the Sun and I'm really glad I did because I got a lot of feedback from readers from all over. Appreciated that story and it gave me the confidence to feel like maybe this would do more good than harm in any time. You're writing about really tough subjects in about personal pain. You're trying to figure out how could I possibly have the ego to think that putting all this pain out? There might do more good than harm. And like most writers. I have quite a bit of under confidence and imposter syndrome, you know, like I've had some success as a writer before this book, but I've also had lots and lots of Despair and plenty of rejection to go around and so it was really hard to convince myself that this is something that I really should do much less needed to do much less the world might benefit from and so writing that essay and getting some response from people did help quite a bit. I wish that all of her head and read it because Now he knows something that is

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little brother doesn't and we've asked him to keep that from Evan and that's a terrible position for him to be in as his little brother's Guardian. I wish he wasn't in it and is part of the kind of the aftermath of all this that still painful. So right here. I don't know how personal this would be. But I'm a retired nurse. So I'm thinking of your father having sexual encounters so frequently, but I don't recall anything being said in the book, although you might have and I just don't recall it had your mother to after all this was revealed. Did she talk about that that she Think about how dangerous it was for her for her health. Yeah, there is a very brief section in the book where I talked about that with my dad. It's dramatized. There's dialogue in which I say don't, you know, you could have given her aides, didn't that worry you And he says I did I worried about that Don, you know, that wasn't a an Avenue that he wanted to explore with me and frankly. I didn't want to know more than

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that. You know, he told me a few things more than that. Those are in the book too. Is that one of the things that is deeply upsetting to my mom. Yeah, I think so. I think it was really deeply upsetting upon learning it. You know. I think that on the one level maybe one thing I could have put in there but I just didn't and maybe I did this to protect my mom. I'm not sure is that she would say things to me like because the I talk about in the book that they that my mom told me that they hadn't had sex in like 10 years my dad would when pressed about that would say like his back was bothering him. That was his reason. and and I think that my mom doubted herself as an attractive woman at age 50, you know, I'm I'm getting close to 50. I'm 42. I have some gray hairs. You know, yeah, it's not closed. I still have a few years. Okay, good. I'm glad yeah not half way. That's great. All right, I retract that. I'm sorry. But um, but you know, I think that my mom was mad about that, but she was also

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having to think like think of all the intimacy that I lost and think of all the doubt that I had to deal with and and here's the answer and I It now and so I think that for her that was as hard or harder, but I don't know. I'm you can see even me right on my feet right now speculating about that and I did a lot of speculation about that about my mom and I think that on some level these are questions that a son shouldn't be asking their parents on some level even in the age of too much information even in the age of Jerry Springer and Oprah and everything and it's like on some level there's things that you both want to know but there's plenty of things that you don't and I felt like I was put in a position as a son to be asking a ton of questions that led me to answers that I was like, oh wow. So, yeah, thank you we have time for one more question isn't yeah right here. Thanks. How do you think your mom and dad are are doing your mom is that harder much harder for her than for her dad for

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our new life because I think of more from the women woman's standpoint of what had happened to her her whole married life that she didn't know about and how she's recovering now. Um, yeah, so how is my mom doing and how are my debt? How is my dad doing my mom? I talked to her a lot and I'll call her up and I'll say Hey, what are you doing? And she'll say I need to call you back and playing bridge. She'll say I'm playing bridge. Can I call you back? And then I'll call her the next day and I'll say hey, you didn't call me back. What are you doing? How are things I'm heading out for bowling right now. Can I call you back? And so when she visits and comes down and hangs out in Albuquerque, she knows everybody at the senior center and they play pinochle and she doesn't like that. They pass cards. She thinks like when you play pinochle you shouldn't have to you know, like so my mom was a university professor and a Dean at three different universities. She was very accomplished. She's very socially

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Savvy she's kind of intense, but she also she makes friends pretty easily and I don't think that she has the kind of close confidants outside of her sisters that that may be that my father was her Confidant and but I think that she has lots and lots of daily happiness. And she lives in the present and and looks forward and doesn't spend a whole lot of time looking back. She's a rural nevadan and she would say that she's not so introspective by temperament, but this has made her more introspective than she would have preferred to have been otherwise And my dad he still works full-time he 72 and he doesn't want to stop working because he's afraid of what might happen if he's just out his lonely house at the edge of the desert all by himself. And so I think his happiest days are when he comes to visit us when he comes to visit my brother and his family. I think that he gets a lot of satisfaction out of helping people at work. If I were a stroke survivor, I would want him to be My speech pathologist.

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I think he has purpose in his days and I think that he battles loneliness to a certain degree that I that causes me kind of a lot of pain. But that's the truth as it is and I didn't want to render it otherwise, but I

also think that that I think that maybe I don't want to end on this. I'm trying to find a way for us to end and go like this. Yeah, but

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I'm really glad that he's out. He survived the suicide attempt and I know the truth of his life as much as he was willing to share it with me, and I'm That my kids know him in the way that they know him and they know his struggles and they're going to grow up and be able to put this in a historical context in a personal context. They're going to carry it with him. So I'll tell you this story. This is a pretty good story and will end on this one. So the other day at elementary school playground Evan who's in fourth grade heard this this other boy who's a fifth grader kind of a big kid and a little bit of a bully call this other kid during Foursquare a faggot and Evan. Started yelling at him and was like, you can't do that. That's not okay. My dad is gay my aunt. My grandpa is gay. Sorry. My grandpa is gay. My grandpa's gay my aunt is gay. That's not okay. And then this kid then turned to Evan. He said you're a retard and then Evan was like watch out and he marched home and said to Christine.

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He said I want you to go to the principal's office and stop this kid. We can't have that. Yeah. Yeah. Um, he's our little social justice boy and he would have been anyway, but now he's armed and ready. Yeah, so thank you very much for coming. It's been a joy. Yeah.

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