



Library podcast

Clarion West presents Connie Willis

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[00:00:36] Hello. We are just about ready to get started.

[00:00:42] My name is Misha Stone and I'm a Reader Services librarian here at the Central Library. Thank you so much for coming out tonight to support Clarion West and University Bookstore in hosting one of the summer reading series and having Connie Willis as our special guest tonight.

[00:01:05] Oh that was beautiful.

[00:01:08] Before I turn this over to Clarion West just a few items of business. This event is supported by The Seattle Public Library Foundation author series sponsor Gary Kunis and media sponsor of the Seattle Times and presented in partnership with the University Bookstore. And I just want to say I'm so excited to have Connie Willis here in the library. I have long been a fan and for those of you who don't know, Connie Willis is the master of ceremonies at the Locus Awards that it happens here in Seattle every Pride weekend. And she does a Hawaiian shirt contest where she shames you if you come without a Hawaiian shirt it is a beautiful thing. And I'm telling you check that out locus awards. So I had to wear something kind of and kind of I'm pretty sure I'd be dinged for this. Right. So without further ado I'm going to pass this on to Yang Yang Wang from Clarion West to get our introduction started. Thank you

[00:02:08] Hello everybody. Thank you all for joining us for the 2017 Clarion West summer reading series. My name is Yang Yang Wang and I am a member of the Clarion West board of directors. This is the third or fourth year of the annual clearing w writers workshop. Our mission is to provide a world class educational opportunity to emerging writers of speculative fiction. The chance to showcase the work of amazing instructors like Connie Willis is a big part of that opportunity. So we'd like to thank the University bookstore the Seattle Public Library and the Seattle Public Library for partnering with us for these events. This series would not be possible without the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts. Amazon.com the Seattle office of arts and culture. King County for culture. The University bookstore the Seattle Public Library and many individual donors and viewers like you.

The readings continue through July 25th. This is one of the two readings that we have here at the library and the rest are at the university bookstore so the next reading at the bookstore will be 6 p.m. or the next reading at the Seattle Public Library will be July 18th at 6 p.m. and it'll feature an hour of original music deejayed by Gabriel Teodros.

[00:03:29] Also the Clarion West write a thon is officially underway. It's our biggest fundraiser of the year. Think of a walkathon. But with words so how many people in here are currently participating in the write-a-thon. Please raise your hands give them a round of applause.

[00:03:53] So in our write-a-thon writers from all over the world sign up and set writing goals and then we recruit sponsors to show their support by making a donation to Clarion West this sponsorship is really important not just a Clarion West but to the individual writers participating.

[00:04:08] We have currently over one hundred and seventy four writers participating this year we currently have over two hundred and four writers participating in the Clarion West write-a-thon this year. I encourage all of you to continue to consider sponsoring one or more of these writers

[00:04:30] In order to do so. Visit www.clarionwest.org and browse and go to the write a thon and browse their profiles. Read excerpts from their work learn about their goals and sponsors the writer or writers you wish to encourage so thank you again. Now I'm going to invite the man with the fashion plan Hugh Evans to come up to the microphone and introduce Connie Willis.

[00:05:02] Thank you Yang Yang.

[00:05:05] I am both humbled and honored to be here talking to all of you about someone who is such a vital pillar of the literary world someone whose works have affected so many people including myself so profoundly. Connie. Oh yeah there you are. I'm still recovering from passage by the way. So how does one introduce a legend. What can I tell you about Connie Willis that you don't already know that she's one more Hugo awards than she has fingers that she has a nebula trophy for each day of the week or that she is one of just 33 authors ever to have been awarded the grand the title of a grand master of science fiction. How about that she loves ironing she really does know that's common knowledge that she's hopelessly in love with a certain British TV show about dinosaurs and time portals. That's very common knowledge. OK well I'll skip the Connie Willis writer extraordinaire stuff because that would take literally all night. And I'll skip the primeval too because everyone should. Oh I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I misspoke. That's not what it says here. No we'll skip primeval because Connie would prefer to cover that sacred topic herself. So how about the thing that brings her to Seattle this week teaching. This is the ninth time Connie has taught Clarion West and that is the record second place goes to Samuel R. Delaney with eight. The first time Connie taught was 30 years ago in nineteen eighty seven the last time though was just five years ago in 2012 which was when I was lucky enough to attend as a student. It's funny the things that I do and do not remember about Connie's week. I do remember her telling us we could never kill the dog which she told this year's class just today. And then following that up

[00:07:04] Following that up with all of the acceptable ways to kill the dog.

[00:07:11] I also remember writing a time travel story for her to critique and then I remember her telling us what her favorite curse word was and why those two events may or may not have been related. One thing I definitely do not remember is the moment at which Connie injected my brain with a partial mental clone of herself. But she must have done because for the past five years every time I've written anything longer than a shopping list she's been there a little corny voice guiding and cajoling reminding encouraging.

[00:07:42] Hugh you're being too nice to your characters. You really have to make them suffer. Because if you've read pretty much anything by Connie you know just how terrible she is to her creations. You think George R.R. Martin kills a lot of characters reread Domesday Book

[00:08:04] Connie puts her people through hell over and over and over again. And if at any point in the story they're not going through hell it's only because their path has been blocked by yet another petty impediment or officious official. But that's Connie to her fictional characters who she dearly loves by the way and who she succeeds in making her readers love. Connie to her writing students on the other hand who are like children to her is something entirely different. Nowhere is there a more generous and giving teacher. And nowhere is there one with more writing wisdom to give. Connie Willis is passionate about good writing and she will bend over backward or possibly even travel through time and battle anachronistic dinosaurs to help her students achieve it. Now it's time to hear some of her good writing so please join me in welcoming tonight's reader and Clarion West twenty seven teens week four instructor Connie Willis.

[00:09:04] You might want to wait till you hear the story before you really do that you know. Thank you so much. All of you for coming and thank you for that wonderful introduction what a terrific introduction. Thank you Hugh. And know that my favorite curse word and my critique of you had nothing to do with each other. It was a witch by the way. It's shit is my favorite curse word. And the reason it is is because it's the only ironic curse word there is most curse words. The more forceful you want to say them the louder you say them and the more violently you say them but with shit it's the opposite is true the more deadly something is it's happening to you the quieter your voice gets. And in fact the last two words that are recorded on more. Voice recorders on airplanes that have smashed into the ground is a very very quiet.

[00:09:53] Oh shit. Which explains that. I'm sorry. He's the one who brought it up. OK

[00:10:02] So. So I want to I'm going to read from something that has to do with my fiftieth anniversary. And before I do that I can tell you a little bit about my fiftieth anniversary my husband and I are celebrating our fiftieth anniversary this summer in two parts. And the reason is because I don't know why it is actually. But we've already celebrated the first half. We went to Connecticut where we first where we lived when we were first married and we wandered around. We had our daughter with us poor thing and we. And we kept saying things like we used to do this here and it's not here anymore. And we used to do this here and it's not here anymore either. And it was really fun

for us. But I don't know how fun it really was for her. But along the way we did do a lot of things. There were a lot of dinosaur sites which of course being a primeval fan. I was very excited to go to see they have some great dinosaur tracks in Connecticut and primeval by the way just to give the pitch one more time. My favorite television program. Ever. Really dumb premise a team with dinosaurs basically a BBC show of five's five short. You know that's for five short seasons of Six or seven episodes piece. You can get an on Netflix watch it in order to not give up on it until you have watched the first season completely which is the first six episodes after the six steps. My daughter was ahead of us in watching it. She had gotten it first and recommended it. And I started watching it and I finished. Episode six somewhere around 3:00 in the morning. And and called I guess it was I guess it was around 5:00 where I was and called her. And she lives in California. So it's like 4:00 in the morning and instead of going what. Or you know Oh my God who died which are my two standard responses when I'm called at that hour in the morning she said Hello Mother I assume that you have just finished watching episode six.

[00:12:05] And I had and so then from then on we were completely hooked. So I do recommend it. I just it's a dumb show but I love it because it's it. The dialogue is wonderful. The plotting is great.

[00:12:16] The characters all have arcs. Everything I teach at Cleary and comes true in this show. It's like they took my class. Only they did so.

[00:12:25] So anyway but it's a it's a great show and very funny and it has and really Potts who's really really cute. So what more can you want. So anyway that's what we did for the first half of our of our wedding anniversary and I'll tell you about the second half in a minute. But while we were in Connecticut we went to the Groton Naval Submarine Museum which is terrific. And there I saw this wonderful thing that I have to share with you if you were at the. The locus awards. I'm sorry you've already heard this but I'm going to share something that I did not write but which I consider to be a masterpiece of writing. OK. So one of my favorite movies is Operation Petticoat with Kari Grant. Yeah yeah yeah. Operation Petticoat. Raise your hand. Yeah. OK. At with Kari Grant and Tony Curtis. And in it they make a reference to a certain letter that was written in the Navy and I assumed it was very funny and I assumed that it was

[00:13:23] You know made up for the movie which is a comedy. And so to Mike's shock and surprise when we went to Groton I found this letter hanging on the wall. It is a real letter which was sent in the Navy by a submarine commander to the supply depot. And I just have to read it to you because it is my favorite letter of all time except possibly for the letter that the Marx Brothers sent to Warner Brothers legal department when Warner Brothers legal department told them that they could not call their movie a night in Casablanca because Warner Brothers already owned the name Casablanca. Even though Casablanca is a place. And so they wrote this brilliant letter which you can find online. I recommend everyone going to find it it's too long for me to read in it. They discussed why this was not possible that if the Warner Brothers were going to lay claim to Casablanca they were going to lay claim to brothers because the Marx Brothers had been around way longer than the Warner Brothers.

[00:14:29] And what about the Smith brothers and also brother can you spare a dime. And it's a brilliant letter and the best part of it is that of course it's hilarious but they send it to the legal department which meant no one there has a sense of humor. So so it apparently passed around. From hand to hand in the legal department for months on end. Why they tried to make heads or tails out of it and figure out what to do. And I often think of that when I'm feeling blue about the world and how it's going I remember those lawyers passing it around it just cheers me up somehow. So but this is my other favorite letter of all time

[00:15:08] And this is not my my e-book. So who knows if I can turn the page or not. OK

[00:15:14] So the situation was that the USS Skipjack a submarine had placed an order with a supply yard in Maryland California.

[00:15:23] In June of 1941. And then of course Pearl Harbor and the war and so on and they received on June when is it they received a letter back many many months later.

[00:15:38] I can't remember exact. It's in the letter saying that they could not fill the order. And so the commander sat down and wrote the following letter. USS Skipjack June 11th 1942 to the supply officer Navy Yard Mare Island California V. Commander submarines Southwest specific subject toilet paper. Reference USS Holland USS Skipjack etc. canceled invoice number 2 7 2 8 3 6 enclosure copy of canceled invoice 2 sample of material requested number one this vessel submitted a requisition for one hundred and fifty rolls of toilet paper on July 30th 1941 to the USS Holland. The material was ordered by Holland from the supply officer Navy Yard Maryland for delivery to USS Skipjack number two the supply officer Navy Yard Maryland on November twenty six the nineteen forty one cancelled lips. No I couldn't do this cancelled Mare Island invoice number 2 7 2 8 3 6 with the stamps notation cancelled cannot identify. This cancelled invoice was received by Skipjack on June 10th nineteen forty two. Number three during the eleven and three quarter months elapses from the time of ordering the toilet paper and the present date the skipjack personnel despite their best efforts to await delivery of subject material

[00:17:11] Have been unable to wait on numerous occasions and the situation is now quite acute especially during depth charge attacks by Nazi submarines number four enclosure 2 is a sample of the desired material provided for the information of the supply officer the commanding officer USS Skipjack cannot help but wonder what is being used at Maryland in place of this unidentifiable material once so well-known to this command. Number five Skipjack personnel during this period have become accustomed to use of ersatz i.e. the vast amount of incoming non-essential paperwork. And in so doing feel that the wish of the bureau ships for the reduction of paperwork is being complied with. Thus effectively killing two birds with one stone. Number seven in order to cooperate in our war effort at a small local sacrifice the skipjack desires no further action be taken until the end of the current war which has created a situation aptly described as war is hell

[00:18:24] Signed J.W. Co. Commander. I

[00:18:34] Love with this letter I may I may put a copy of it up in my bathroom it's so cool.

[00:18:40] So anyway. And it's a masterpiece of comedy which people always assume is exaggeration mostly but really it's almost entirely understatement. And this is a masterful example of that. So. So the second half of our wedding anniversary the entire solar system is apparently decided to celebrate because they're having a total eclipse on August 21st and our anniversary is on August twenty third. So we are celebrating by going to the eclipse and this will not be the first total eclipse that we have been to. It's actually quite close to where I live. I'm in Colorado it's only three hours north to Wieland Wyoming which is where the totality starts. But we are not going there because Wyoming has almost no roads and the the population of the state is expected to triple in the days surrounding the eclipse. And there are no hotel rooms available at all. So we are going to Carney Nebraska Whew. Which has nothing to recommend it except that it'll be really dark for a couple of minutes. So so we are going there instead and a whole bunch of people are also going there and I think it will be really fun.

[00:19:56] And the reason I mentioned this is because the story I want to read is from I wrote immediately after the eclipse in 1979 which was visible up in Lewes town Montana. And my husband our daughter and our dear friend Ed Bryant wonderful science fiction writer who just died this year went with us to the eclipse and we had a wonderful time. And and I was so looking forward to Ed Being at this next eclipse. And and sadly he will not be there but we plan to after the after the eclipse was over. He began shouting on core on core. So so we will be doing that in in honor of him and taking a bottle of champagne with us to toast him because he was wonderful. However as soon as we got in the car to come home and it was a very long gosh all the way to Montana it was a two day drive. We he said you know one of us should write a an eclipse story. And I said well both of us can't and he said. Right. So whoever finishes their first wins.

[00:21:04] So I wrote mine in the back seat on the way home. And

[00:21:09] And then he didn't write his so. So anyway I'm going to be reading something that I wrote at about the age that many of my students are at right now and that I wrote a long time ago and I hope it won't be too humiliating. Okay.

[00:21:23] It's called and come from miles around Laney had to go to the bathroom again. Meg guided her through the crowded cafe to the back. The bathroom was crowded too. Meg waited in the hall with the lady on the wall above the telephone. Someone had written in magic marker eclipse or bust and drawn a crude sun. A circle with an uneven lines radiating from it. Under that someone had scrawled in pencil. It better not be cloudy. I came all the way from Houston

[00:21:52] When men came back to the table carrying her little girl rich and pollos had both disappeared. Meg ordered Laney another coke and stared out the window wondering how long it would take a two year old to overdose on sugar. Emergency Situations required emergency measures and 700 miles in a car with Laney was an emergency situation with Rich's colleague pollos along. Laney could hardly be allowed to indulge in her usual trip behavior which was to hang over the

backs of their seats shouting out at regular intervals and dropping her gun down their backs. This trip. Meg had sat in the back seat with Laney and a litter of sticker books and dog clothes popping Cheerios in her mouth every time she asked how much farther it was to Tampa and now here they were in Montana and the men had gone God knows where probably back to the Chamber of Commerce to ask more obscure questions about f stops and smoke glass filters. They had already been there once Meg had stood outside in the slushy snow while Laney ran around and around the town's resident Air Force missile. Screaming like a wild thing. No one had paid any attention to her or to Meg. They clustered in little groups reading over the free brochures and arguing about a line of minuscule clouds in the Southwest. They were clustered together on the streets too. The locals were easy to spot. They were the only ones who weren't anxiously watching the sky for signs of gathering clouds. They were also the only ones not wearing T-shirts that said eclipse 79 in psychedelic orange and yellow. The four men walking down the other side of the street were definitely not locals.

[00:23:26] They were all talking at once and gesturing wildly at the sky. Scientists thought Meg you can always tell scientists their pants are too short.

[00:23:37] These four all looked to like black pants short sleeved shirts with the pocket crammed with pencils and metal clips and a calculator. This was a long time ago. Short sandy hair and black rimmed glasses. Heads of four science departments somewhere Meg thought scientific ice Americanness in the flesh. They were obviously talking about the weather even threatening it from the look of some of those gestures. Though the sky except for that minuscule line of clouds to the Southwest was this clear was clear as far as Meg could see. And yet they were oblivious to the weather to standing there in the 20 degree cold in their shirt sleeves after a minute a fifth person joined them looking dressed for an eclipse in Hawaii and a flower splashed orange shirt. She would have thought the five of them were in the wrong place altogether. If Rich's coat hadn't still been slung over the back of the booth. He was obviously oblivious to the weather too. The men came back. Richard bought a T-shirt for Laney. She refused to put it on. I think I'd better take her back to the motel so she can have some kind of nap Meg said she's about done in. Rich nodded. You didn't bring any masking tape did you.

[00:24:44] Meg. Some guys over at the Chamber of Commerce said an eye patch makes it easier to see the corona at totality. Maybe one of the drug stores is open Pollo said. Seminars start at one. Maybe we can find a drug store before then. What if I meet you at the seminar Ridge said. He gave Meg the key to the motel room and took off again remembering his coat this time. Meg struggled Blaney into a snow suit paid the bill and carried her back to the motel to redheaded teenage boys were setting up an expensive looking telescope in the parking lot of the motel. The no vacancy sign flashed on and off in the sunny afternoon Laney was already asleep against Meg shoulder. She stopped to admire the telescope. The boys were from Arizona. Do you realize how lucky we are one of them said. I mean how lucky. It does look like we're going to have good weather Meg said shielding her eyes against the sun to look at the clouds. They seem to be dwindling. I don't mean the weather the boy said with an air of contempt for it. Meg was sure he didn't feel not when he'd come all the way from Arizona.

[00:25:45] If we were on Jupiter he said we wouldn't have this at all. No Meg said smiling I suppose we wouldn't see the sun is exactly 400 times bigger than the moon in exactly 400 times farther away. So they just fit. It doesn't happen like that anyplace else in the whole universe probably.

[00:26:03] He was talking very loudly. Laney shifted uneasily against Meg shoulder. Her cheeks were flushed. A sure sign that she was worn out. Meg smiled at the boys and took Laney into the room. She turned back the red shiny old bedspread and laid her down on the blankets and kicked off her shoes and lay down beside her. The boys were still outside when she woke up loudly telling the motel owner how lucky she was not to be living on Venus the motel owner probably already knew how lucky she was Meg was relatively sure she didn't usually get to use her no vacancy sign in February. She was positive. She didn't usually get thirty five dollars of room.

[00:26:41] I'm sorry that detail just kills me.

[00:26:46] Meg had a long shiny vertical crease down her cheek from where she'd slept on the folded back bedspread she combed her hair pulled on a sweater and sat down on the bed beside Laney. It was only one thirty. The seminar was supposed to last two hours followed by a film at three o'clock. There was no way Laney could last through the whole thing. She might as well let her sleep. Laney was staring at her wide eyed from the bed Tanna. She asked sleepily. Yes Meg said go back to sleep. Laney sat up. Clips. She asked and crawled off the bed. Not yet. Would you like to go swimming. Let's get your boots on the redheaded boys were gone from the parking lot. They'd probably gone to the seminar. The motel owner directed Meghan Laney to a park two blocks off the main street. Meg walked slowly letting Laney dawdle over a puddle and poke at the piles of dirty snow with a stick. She found on the way Meg saw the five scientists again. She was relieved to see they were no longer running around in the freezing winter afternoon without coats. They were all in parkas now and had an assortment of hats among them an enormous Stetson. And a red plaid wool deer stalker with your flowers they must have finally gotten cold Meg thought or else its protective coloration. Now they looked like everybody else. It didn't really matter what they wore though they could be wearing clown suits or have two hair heads for all anyone would notice.

[00:28:07] The locals looked only at your money and everybody else was watching the sky. They were still arguing fiercely about the weather almost frantically though men couldn't make out what they were saying it sounded a little like a foreign language. Although men couldn't be sure. Scientists talking to each other always sounded a little like a foreign language. There was no one in the park. Meg wiped a sweat dry with the tail of her coat and let set Jake I'm sorry. Set Laney gently going back and forth. She made a circuit of the park. Avoiding puddles and thinking it was an awfully small town to have two missiles. This one was not anything like the needle shaped red white and blue one. The Chamber of Commerce had. It was short and squat and a painfully nondescript pale khaki color army surplus. It had no markings to identify it but along one side were long scraggly marks that looked as if they had been scrawled in charcoal local graffiti. Meg thought and moved closer. It wasn't graffiti unless it had been put on with a blow torch the long row of hash marks had been burned onto the side of the missile. They were slightly uneven in length Laney's idea of writing. At the end of the line was a circle with more hash marks radiating from it.

[00:29:14] The circle reminded her of something but she couldn't think what. Rocket Laney said. No honey it's a missile she said. Actually it did look a little like a rocket rocket. Laney repeated. She was standing behind Meg in a puddle. Meg couldn't see the tops of her boots. Oh Laney. Meg said you're good boots. She helped her out of the puddle boots. Laney wailed wet. Oh honey Meg said and picked her up in her arms. Let's go change into your sneakers. OK. You're pretty red sneakers. Laney sniffed wet. I know. She said it seemed like a long way back to the motel. Let's pretend we're in a rocket. Meg said to distract Laney. Where shall we go. Tanner. Said. Fontana. Meg laughed. Why see clips. Laney said solemnly. Meg stopped in the middle of the street and looked back at the park. By the time Meg got Laney into dry socks and the red sneakers it was nearly three thirty which meant the question should be over and the scheduled movie started. Laney was very good in movies no matter what they were about. So Meg decided to risk meeting Rich thank goodness it was. It was a little town the high school was only two blocks farther than the park. Perched on the top of the hill the Chamber of Commerce had recommended that as the best viewing site for tomorrow Meg had guessed wrong about the movie.

[00:30:36] They were still asking questions. Rich and pollos were halfway down the auditorium and halfway into a row Meg decided against trying to get to them and sat down in an empty seat almost at the back. She helped leaning out of her coat and handed her a pack of gum clips leaning asked not yet Meg said but there'll be a movie soon I hope. She thought. She tried to tell from the questions being asked how near they were to being finished. But it was impossible to tell anything. The questions were a jumble about shadow bands welder's glass Mylar film Bailey's beads. Meg had the feeling from the look on the face of the man leading the discussion that some of the questions have been asked for. It was probably a teacher because he didn't know how to hold the microphone right. He was certainly a scientist. He had a calculator and five pencils in his shirt pocket his pants came almost to the top of his socks. I'm sorry. I'm married to a scientist said a teacher so I can say this stuff. Meg wondered idly where her five scientists were. She didn't see them in the crowd though there were several stepsons and one fluorescent orange deer stalker and a million parkas. If Hollywood Barr were sponsoring the eclipse Meg thought this is what it would look like. Laney stood on her seat and offered gum to the elderly couple behind her.

[00:31:51] The science teacher finally stopped one of the redheaded boys in mid question and started the movie. It was a national geographic film of an eclipse out in the ocean somewhere. The scientists who did this narration was the spitting image of Meg's five. He even had on an orange flowered Hawaiian shirt. He talked for 15 minutes about the mechanics of eclipses. While Laney stared Rapley at the screen not even chewing her gum. The fact that solar eclipses occur at all the narrator said is due to a coincidence unique in the solar system. As far as we know unique in our whole celestial neighborhood it's all due to the diameter of the moon which is three thousand four hundred eighty kilometres being point 0 to 5 times the diameter of the sun which is he was off again working out chalky equations. Laney loved it. The gist of it. Meg gathered was not that there were eclipses since everything in the universe must sooner or later manage to get in the way of everything else and ruin the view. The amazing coincidence part was that the sun and the moon were an exact geometric fit so that instead of just darkness there were the Corona the prominence is all the show that people

came from miles around to see. Laney had to go to the bathroom. Meg tracked her down a locker lined Hall and nearly collided with her scientists. They brushed past and out a side door onto the school's tennis courts.

[00:33:08] The courts were heaped with black snow but they commanded an unbroken view of the sky Meg could see now what they had been arguing about. The sky was still clear with only a few delicate cirrus clouds above the dipping sun and that threatening line of clouds to the Southwest had disappeared. But there was a faint haze to the west that Meg recognized now as weather coming a big front to it might be overcast by as early as tonight. So why weren't the four worried. They did not look worried at all. The argument was coming near to being resolved. Meg thought watching them through the door because their expressions were nearly in agreement and their gesturing was on a small and more soothing scale. In fact Meg thought they looked a little smug like rich and pollos when they had found the mistake in the program and could now go full speed ahead without interference. She wondered what the weather report for tomorrow would be. I don't need to hear. She thought it rationally I already know she watched them through the door for a few more minutes and then took Laney to the bathroom. The questioning in the auditorium went on for almost another hour after the movie during which time Laney went through two more packs of gum and a roll of lifesavers. The old couple behind her gave them a behind gave her.

[00:34:21] Meg decided they were saints sat down from heaven to help young mothers through the eclipse if heaven wasn't too far to come. Meg thought idly while the man with the microphone held forth on the construction of a pinhole view from a shoe box. How far was too far to come. Everyone who had been in the auditorium was in the cafe and then some. The special was something called an eclipse Burger which turned out to be a hamburger with a fried egg and cheese on top. I am not making any of this up said. Laney took the top bun off and refused to eat anything at all. Rich and pollos talked about the weather while Meg scraped egg and cheese off Laney's hamburger. They hadn't noticed the haze yet. Do you realize how far some of these people have come Rich said. That guy that was sitting next to us was from New York. He drove out. Yeah. If it's overcast tomorrow there are gonna be some mighty unhappy people. Paolo said IC lane he said pointing to the yellow mess beside her hamburger. Meg scraped the offending goo onto her own plate. It seems to me she said that if you had come far enough you would have some way of ensuring that the weather was clear. She put the top bun on the hamburger and handed it to Laney rich and polos were looking at her as if she had lost her mind.

[00:35:37] You mean cloud seeding. Rich said finally I just exactly how far do you think people come to something like this. They looked at each other. I don't know Pollo said. They're supposed to be some astronomers here from Italy. Are there five of them. Meg said without thinking and then stopped. They were looking at her again but they don't have to come do they. She said I mean I thought scientists could see everything they needed to with the satellite equipment the corona and all that I mean. She finished weekly catch up Laney said. Meg handed the cash a bottle. She wouldn't be able to get the lid off and it would keep her occupied. Rich was Rich was still frowning. In a minute he would ask What's the matter and she would say there are five scientists here who aren't from Italy. And then he would really think she was crazy. But he was frowning about something else. You know

he said thoughtfully somebody else was saying the same thing this afternoon that with all the above the atmosphere equipment we've got now there's really no reason for all the elaborate setup. Every Eclipse. Then why did they come all the way from Italy. Meg persisted. She was not sure what she wanted him to say. Perhaps that the distances were dwindling that nobody came very far anymore just to see an eclipse. Rich hesitated.

[00:36:50] They just I don't know. They come to see the show Paul said. Paolo said suddenly. He said they come for the same reason that the Pilgrims went to Canterbury. Teddy Roosevelt went to Yellowstone that astronauts went to the moon. He said to see the show. Well but surely it's more than just that scientific curiosity. Rich said an experimental research and. Pollos shook his head. That's only protective coloration he said. Meg sucked in her breath but there's still a lot of information that can't be gotten any other way Rich said. Look at. Like Laney said again. Meg could not see Laney's plate under the catch up. She had apparently gotten the lid off quite easily.

[00:37:38] After supper they went back to the motel. The men stood outside with the red headed boys and debated the weather. The faint haze had become a light film nearly obscuring Jupiter. Although the moons could still be seen faintly through policies telescope Meg gave Laney her bath and put her to bed. She wash out the catch up stained t shirt and the mud soaked socks and hung them over the shower curtain rod in the bathroom. Then she got ready for bed herself inflict on the TV. It was a Helena station. Helena was worried about early morning fog. They were recommending Lewis town and grass range. Apparently Helena hadn't noticed the haze. There was a guest meteorologist from Denver. He explained how the Russians had used cloud seeding during the last eclipse in an attempt to obtain a view of it through the through dense cloud cover. Modern technology had not developed to a level of sophistication necessary for weather control due to complicated airflow patterns but plans were already being made for the eclipse in Hawaii so that hopefully they would not they would be able not only to predict but to guarantee good weather to the people who had traveled so far to see this wonder of nature. Meg turned off the TV and went to bed. She woke up at six thirty frozen stiff. The door of the motel room was standing open. She yanked on her coat pulled the covers up over Laney and went outside. It was just starting to get light rich and Pollo stood with their hands in their pockets looking miserable. The redheaded boys had the back of their yellow hatchback open and we're slinging sleeping bags and equipment into it.

[00:39:06] The sky was completely overcast. Where are they going. Meg asked Rich Helena. He sounded grim which meant he was frantic with worry but Helen is supposed to have fog. She said fog might burn off this. He waved a hand at the sky. It was getting lighter by the minute. The clouds look totally impenetrable. A major front. What do you think pollos. I think if we don't make up our minds within the next few minutes it'll be too late to make any difference he said. We've only got about two hours till it starts. The redheaded boys came out with the last load two backpacks and the camera tripod. They threw them in the back of the car and slammed down the hatch. One of the one of them had drawn eclipse special with his finger in the mud on the back window next to it. He had drawn a sun. A circle with uneven lines radiating from it. I say Helena. Rich said great Pollo said and turned back to the motel. No Meg said they all looked at or even the redheaded boys. They will never forgive me if it's cloudy and they miss the eclipse. She thought. It's the last one in North America in this

century and they will never forgive me. But Helena has fog and we have no she said again. They were waiting for her to explain and to explain would be disastrous there is no need to go anywhere she said. Clearly we'll be able to see the eclipse from here.

[00:40:29] How do you know that. Rich asked. I know it. Her tone sounded convincing even to herself. The redheaded boys looked almost persuaded. How do you know it pollos asked. Women's intuition. She almost said. There's no such thing and you know it. But the boys looked as if they might believe it. They were only 18. And emergency situations demand emergency measures. Yes she said women's intuition. It's going to clear off in time to see the eclipse. All right Rich said we stay the teenage boys looked at each other nodded their heads and started hauling their stuff back out of the car. Rich took Meg's arm and led her back to the motel room meet you for breakfast in fifteen minutes pollos. He said. Yeah. Pollo said laughing there's one benefit of saying here we get to eat rich shut the door behind them. Women's intuition he said. You know something don't you. Meg looked at him steadily.

[00:41:28] You've seen something you said.

[00:41:31] Yes. She thought. Dust marks on a car. Two missiles in a town the size of pinhole viewer. Five scientists who look so much like scientists they could have been copied out of a new National Geographic film who aren't worried about this storm. A child's drawing of the sun. Laney yes I've seen lots of things but I'm the only one who's gonna notice five scientists in a town full of scientists who's going to notice that they're speaking some strange foreign language. Everybody's speaking science and nothing's stranger than that who's gonna notice everything. You're all looking at the sky. She kept silent how on earth can you believe that mess out there is going to clear off by eight 30 clips. He said from the bed. Clips Meg said firmly let's get your clothes on so we can go eat breakfast they set up in front of the high school. Meg did not see the five scientists anywhere. It was not even possible to see the sun's disk through the gray blanket of clouds though what it was though it was possible to get an image through the telescopes. We have contact one of the red headed boys said at age 21 and there was scattered applause. Sun Laney asked behind the clouds. Rich said everyone was going through the motions of setting up telescopes cameras binoculars for projecting an image on the snow. Nobody looked at the sky. The elderly couple let me look through a pinhole view made out of an oatmeal box. Even though there was nothing to see. Meg walked Blaney around the outside of the high school and told her all about not looking at the sun unless she had her special glasses on that Daddy had made for her at 9 04 she found her scientists where they had been before on the tennis courts around the other side of the building.

[00:43:10] They were setting up their equipment most of which was short fat and the same faded khaki as the missile in the park. They were all talking animatedly at each other and nodding at the sky. At 9 0 5. The clouds around the sun began to be pushed away and a ragged circle and the sun's disk to shine very thinly through. Meg made Laney put her special glasses on at 9 17 the sun came out and everybody cheered. Meg walked Laney back around to the front of the school where rich had the telescope set up. Rich looked frantic which meant that he was hopeful. He and pollos were wearing eye patches made of Kleenex and masking tape. It began to get dark in the West a purple

blue darkness like a summer rainstorm. Meg looked through the filtered telescope at the last sliver of the sun still shining too bright to look at him now completely blue. Eastern half of the sky. At 924 Apollo said she's a common. Meg picked Laney up and started edging away from the men in the direction of the tennis courts. It began to get very dark. Laney clung to Meg's neck and squeezed her eyes shut under the Mylar glasses. Shadows rippled suddenly over Meg like a shudder.

[00:44:21] She looked up and was caught by the eclipse. There was a flash like the captured light from a diamond and then there it was suspended in the sky. The sky was not totally dark reflection from the snow she thought. The science teacher had explained it yesterday in the auditorium. He had not explained how beautiful it would be. The sky was adorned Blue was pink shining from the retreating clouds like a coming sunrise in the center of that fragile blue the sun flared out on all sides from behind the Meg pride Laney's arms loose from around her neck and took her glasses off of her. This is it. Laney honey she whispered look at the clips. Lamy turned around shyly as if she were being introduced to someone. Oh. She said in a tiny voice and stuck her finger in her mouth. Her other hand she kept tight around Mick's neck. Twenty nine. Twenty eight. One of the redheaded boys was counting backwards. It could not possibly have been two minutes already. A fine line of light appeared at one side of the bluish circle. There she goes somebody said Meg shoved Laney's glasses back on her and looked down at the snow. The sun flared black back into blindness and there was a tremendous roar of applause. The redheaded boys pounded Meg on the back. Boy was that ever neat. They kept saying Boy are we ever glad we listened to you Rich grinned at her. You have set women's lib back one hundred years. You said

[00:45:47] And sweet and squeezed her hand. Quite a show Pollo said rocking back contentedly on his heels.

[00:45:53] Quite a show. Oh. Meg said and took off through the forest of Tripods with Laney still in her arms. They were already gone. The five of them carrying their equipment down the hill. There was probably time to catch them before they made it to the park. But I didn't want to catch them Meg thought. I just wanted to see what they thought of it to see if they thought it was worth it. Coming all this way she could see them gesturing their gestures had taken on grandiose proportions. Meg decided it must have been worth it. Laney had to go to the bathroom she explained. When they got back the air had turned chilly. Meg put Laney's hood up ten degree drop in temperature during the eclipse Pollo said it looks like it's turning bad again too. He got into the car even layer of clouds was pushing steadily back over the sun. Meg settled Laney in the back seat and then helped rich get the camera tripod maneuvered into the trunk.

[00:46:44] You're not going to tell me are you rich said Meg looked at him. Tell you what. He slammed the trunk shut. Meg got into the back seat with Lady rich started the car. I sure would like to know what you did back there Paulo said. That was some weather predicting. Meg said she was straining to see the park as they passed the side street. She and Laney had walked up rocket lane he said rocket Tanna clips.

[00:47:13] What honey. Rich asked.

[00:47:15] Emergency situations demand emergency measures. Meg popped a lifesaver into Laney's mouth.

[00:47:34] It was quite an easy story to write because it was all true all of it and I. I did not have a two year old with me at 10 year old with me who is much easier to deal with. But but I knew a lot of 2 year olds at that point so I knew and I had spent a lot of time missing concerts and missing movies and missing everything. Taking them to the bathroom.

[00:47:56] So so I was well aware of that but I always like to write about people who are are not who are off to the side for some reason who are overlooked or not noticed or for some reason not in the mainstream of what's going on. Because I've always felt that gives them a tremendous opportunity to see things that nobody else sees and to look at society from a different angle.

[00:48:18] So I had a lot of fun writing that story and I was so glad that I beat Ed although now I wish I had. You know that Ed had written the story too because I'm sure it would have been spectacular. So.

[00:48:29] So are there questions are there things you want to know about I know why the Marx Brothers wrote that letter.

[00:48:39] As in the Marx Brothers they once went to New York. They were once playing cards at a country club in L.A. and one of them probably Harpo said let's go tip over George Kaufman. So they drove to the airport and caught a plane to New York and got out of the plane and took a taxi and went to the theater where George coffins play was showing and tipped him over and came back.

[00:49:04] So you know the Marx Brothers. What can I say. So. Yes. They talked about it. All the time. In my

[00:49:15] Area. How. Do. You change. Your perspective.

[00:49:21] The students never change. One of my students are my some of my students here. They're my students. Hi. Hi guys. Close your ears. Mom is going to talk about stuff now. They never change. None of them can plot. None of you can plot as you well know correct. I am here to teach them to plot. They will know how to plot. By the end of this week so we're making excellent progress. They do. They do however know how to critique their fabulous critquers and they are very very good writers and they've been putting up with me so I appreciate that a lot. No I actually the classes have all kind of blurred together in a giant I don't know but I love all my students and every class that I teach is always my favorite class. And you're not my favorite class yet.

[00:50:07] But if you'd watch primeval you could be could be so. And when I told them I told is Veena here I told Veena to read

[00:50:18] That she that if she wanted to know about plotting she should read Victor Hugo's Les Miserables and she made a face that I have never seen on a human being before that indicated that she was not excited about the prospect. But but I'm sure that I can talk her into it by the end of the week. So so anyway. No I love my classes and and I.

[00:50:38] There are so many outstanding writers that come through the program and some of my some of my students this year Kid Johnson is teaching. She taught. What did she teach. Second week. Yes second week and she was one of my students. And Hugh was one of my students and they've all turned out brilliantly. I love them all so. So it's been very very fun. I think Clarion is an absolutely wonderful thing and gives it's a it's summer camp for writers and although there is a tremendous amount of work they work so hard they write and critique and read manuscripts and attend these things and do a number of activities and stuff and they just work so hard. But but they also sit and talk till all hours about every topic under the sun which I think is the very best part of clearing and they get to know people who know that they will know for the rest of their careers and that we'll be friends for the rest of their careers. I did not have the opportunity to come to Clarion. I was taught taught. I wrote in isolation as in a small town for about eight years before I ever connected up with the science fiction community. And by that time is a little late for me to come to Clarion but I had a local workshop that served very much the same function and I met many writers that those early conventions which was kind of the same thing I Nancy Kress is one of when she's sitting right there and Nancy Cresson and Jim Kelly and John castle that I met the very first year of my life and Ed Bryant we remained friends our whole lives because we were together in the trenches back when we hadn't sold anything and we didn't know anybody and we wanted so much to be the greatest writer in the world and we didn't see how that could possibly happen.

[00:52:24] And so it's great and I think but. But I think Clarion has. Gives the opportunity for people to find their own community and to find those friends and it's just a wonderful wonderful thing I'm happy always happy to teach. I was supposed to teach two years ago. This is my makeup here because the day before I was supposed to arrive two years was it two years ago. NEAL Yeah. Two years ago I went to a garage sale and I fell on the ice on the driveway. Of a home. And I broke my eye. Which you would not even think you could do would you. I didn't know I could do it. I broke the orbital bone and the bottom floor of the eyeball and and I caught the muscle of the eye. In it so that. Things looked sort of like those Picasso paintings that are all the slice pieces.

[00:53:19] That was a very strange experience. And I was mortified mortified that I had let them down the day before but they got one of my former students to teach. And so it is great. And she was wonderful. And so.

[00:53:31] But I had to come and make up that that year so that's this is my makeup here and I'm really excited to be here. So

[00:53:38] I didn't break anything. I'm so glad that I didn't go to any garage sales or anything the day before I just sort of wrapped myself in cotton wool and waited for the plane to take off. So so I wouldn't do anything. Yeah. Other questions.

[00:53:49] Yes. When I was writing it you mean yes. The question is when I was writing the C Club story did I have to work on the level of hints and too obvious and not obvious enough. And yes.

[00:54:04] And I was in this local workshop with Ed Bryant and Cynthia Felice and John Stith for many years 17 years to be exact. I was a really slow learner. And one of the nice things about being in a workshop is that you can take a story like this and go. Did you get this. Did you figure it out on page two you know. Or did you not figure that out at all and you can adjust it and we're encouraging all the Clarion West students after their six weeks are over to form either online workshops or two local workshops so they can continue with this feedback because it's really hard to know and especially when you're just starting out. I used to write stuff that I thought was incredibly subtle and in fact it was completely obscure. And so and it's real hard to know what that line is and so it's really helpful yes I did multiple drafts on this I say I wrote it in the car on the way home but I wrote the first draft in the car on the way home. So yes

[00:54:59] You. I I wrote I have always written all of my first drafts by hand. And I do to this day I go to Starbucks and get it iced grande chai and the new york times. And boy has the new - New York Times been great the last couple of days and

[00:55:22] And I and I read the paper and then I write longhand and eavesdrop shamelessly on conversations which I understand was one of my students first week assignments was to eavesdrop shamelessly. I highly recommend it.

[00:55:36] Best conversation I ever eavesdropped on though I've never been able to figure out a story to go with it but I was at the Glenwood hot pool in Glenwood Springs in Colorado is a big hot springs and they have like they have a swimming pool that's like three blocks long and then they have this giant hot pool that is the size of a normal swimming pool and it's too hot to swim in.

[00:55:58] So you just sit on the steps or you wade walk waist high through it slowly all the steam envelops you and you relax and everything.

[00:56:08] But the other thing that happens with the hot pool of course is that the acoustics are incredible because the the steam is there and so there you can hear really far. So I'm sitting quietly on the steps one day. And these two kind of hippy looking guys were walking through the pool and one of them says so do this people that you were house sitting for. While they were in Europe. Did they get home.

[00:56:33] Yeah. Well were they bumbled.

[00:56:38] Yeah I told them houses burned down.

[00:56:49] And then they. And then they drifted off and I was like Wait wait wait.

[00:56:58] And it's just such a great story. I know someday that correct story will come along and I'll be able to put it in there but I haven't yet. So anyway that's what you get if you eavesdrop on conversations you guys. So yes. It. Was. New. Before. Oh then. Well I read I read The New York Times. Usually I read The New York Times from cover to cover and my favorite thing is the obituaries. Because. Not just because I'm old but because. But because. They they summarize the lives of people who are actually running the world

[00:57:32] Who are actually doing all the good stuff out there. They're all the musicians and the painters and the people who invented things and the and the people who started labor movements and the people who just the all the good people are in the New York Times obituary calls. And it's wonderful because you you lose sight of that because the the worst behaved you are. The more coverage you get. You probably knew that. So Martin Sure. Kelly is like on the cover all the time. And and you do lose sight you get a very unbalanced view of the way the world really works. And I always like to especially if I'm feeling down at all.

[00:58:08] Think about all those people who've been quietly working who invented this ballet company that you know that is why we have ballet companies or or the person who who sponsored libraries for years and years or the people who are just out there doing good good work and not getting the attention they deserve.

[00:58:24] So I love that. Plus of course I have to keep track of this bizarre and incredible novel we are all living in right now which when I came I only brought my phone and because I still write everything longhand and I vowed that I would not you know obsessively check my phone to see what was going on. And I have a political friend who calls me and I called her and made her promise that she would only call me if something really big happened you know.

[00:58:56] And so far she has called four times and I have really been excited to hear from her.

[00:59:03] So it's really been fun the last few days. So but but I found myself this morning while trying to critique thinking I wonder what's going on I wonder what's going on and I wonder what I missed here in just a couple of hours. So it is an exciting time we live in. So not a good time but an exciting time.

[00:59:22] Yeah. Still other questions. Yes. I just say. From

[00:59:26] A good segway and cross-talk. Oh well actually crosstalk. Thank you. You're like a paid shill.

[00:59:32] He just asked me a question about crosstalk. CROSSTALK it's my most recent novel and it's it's not one of somebody suggested one time that I that my publishers put the body count of my novels on the cover so that people would not be unwarranted when they start them

[00:59:50] Domesday Book really high to say nothing of the dog zero. So

[00:59:57] And so. But to say it. CROSSTALK is that a romantic comedy about telepathy which I think telepathy would be just a really really really really bad idea. And. It's. Our communications are already overwhelming. And and having to listen to everybody would just be nightmarish beyond hope. I was in Starbucks the while while I was working on the novel. And usually I work at the big communal table. But on this particular day it was really crowded. So I was stuck at one of those little two fairs next to two women who were having a conversation and could not help but overhear their conversation.

[01:00:38] And one of them one of them was saying but this in this case was sorry I was shamelessly eavesdropping has one of them said to the other. Well I when I leave here I've got to go get groceries so I can cook dinner.

[01:00:50] I think I think I might have steak and taters and corn or I could do pork chops maybe some applesauce and or I don't know. Maybe I should make a meatloaf.

[01:01:05] Forty five minutes later she was still discussing what to have for dinner. The other woman had not said a word. And I would kind of have liked to know what she was thinking but I know what I was thinking and I thought Oh my God what if we could hear other people's thoughts and we were trapped listening to this woman for ever.

[01:01:27] Plus people when they do telepathy stories they always assume that you're gonna be able to talk to the cute guy or to the you know to somebody interesting it could be a serial killer. You could be telepathically connected to Ted Bundy or Martin Shaw Kelly. Think about that. You don't want that. I won't even name the political alternative. She might be it too. So you know.

[01:01:49] So I thought I would write a book about that. And and of course have someone become accidentally telepathic and show you exactly what a terrible idea was so but I had a lot of fun writing the book. Yeah. Oh OK. She's asking about my novel bellwether and what my motivation was bellwethers.

[01:02:07] A short comic novel about fads and where fads come from and I the motivation for that book was my grandmother. She was showing me pictures of. Our family. And there was a picture of her at 18 for her high school graduation and all the girls had long hair you know and they had those big white bows that they weren't back of their hair and stuff. And then she showed me a picture of like three years later and it was of some event. There in her town.

[01:02:41] And every single girl had bobbed hair and I was like what happened there and she said well I was the first one to Bob my hair in my town and I said Why did you have your hair bobbed. I don't. I just did. And I thought. Huh

[01:03:04] Interesting because my grandmother is not a person who doesn't have an answer for everything.

[01:03:08] So. So I was just very fascinate. What was going on you know and you can always find certain sociological trends and things with the bobbed hair. Women who had served in World War 1 had cut their hair short because of lice in you know in the hospitals and things where they were working. So that made sense. And then Irene Castle was real popular and she had been ill with typhoid and had had to cut her hair and she was like you know the Kim Kardassian of her time except smart and talented and

[01:03:43] And and so I. And so the kind of person that people would copy. So I thought well maybe that's it. And there are a lot of different things feeding into it but nothing. That just basically made women who had had their hair long for like thousands of years all suddenly cut their hair at the same time.

[01:03:59] And so I just got fascinated by the whole thing about group think and fads and where fads come from and how you know how these things happen. And I had a wonderful time with it. I did corporate fads and I did Barbie doll fads and I did all kinds of things and I came up with a list of what I was doing the corporate fads that came up with the list of five words that you could use for any corporate situation.

[01:04:23] And they were of course you know optimal ops optimization and things like that. And I talked to a woman after the book came out. She said I love that list.

[01:04:32] She said I've used it in every meeting at my company since stuff I like. So I was right but that's not a good thing. That's not good. So.

[01:04:42] But it was very very fun to. Very fun to write.

[01:04:45] The only bad bad feedback I got from that novel was a woman came up to me to a book signing one time it was really angry really angry. And she said I just read bellwether. And I said OK. And she said. Well. The whole message seems to be think for yourself.

[01:05:07] And I said well yes yes indeedy that is in fact the message. And she just stormed off.

[01:05:13] So I don't know. I was a very odd encounter. So yes. Question. Yes

[01:05:21] Ok. OK.

[01:05:23] Those are kind of two different questions. OK. He asked me what my research process is and then sort of fantasy and reality intercept. So far I am pretty clear that between them kind of in my life not always but most of the time. So yeah it was science fiction. People think that you don't have to do research for science fiction because you're just making this stuff up. But of course the truth is that you have to research everything. And. You have to research even for a story like this you have to remember where everything is and what's going on and stuff. And and one of the worst stories I wrote was when I wrote the last of the Winnebago which was set in Phoenix a town that I had lived in I had

to get out of it the street maps and make sure that everything was right about it because there's nothing worse than the stuff you think you know you should never rely on things that you think you know because you're always wrong. And so and people will write letters about that Indian Hill Road is not where you put it etc. So you have to be right. I do buy time travel stuff of course has tons of research. And for some of it I had to do just buckets and buckets of research but I really love doing the research. That's my favorite part. So when I did Domesday Book I had to research pretty much everything about the Middle Ages. I knew quite a bit about the Black Death already but not about the Middle Ages. And so I had to research that. And when I did. But when I did. To say nothing of the dog. I didn't have to do any research at all because it's the Victorian era. That's my era. That's my era. And I've been reading about it since I was a kid. And so all I had to really look up for that was the rules of croquet because I couldn't remember what they were because everyone always cheats at croquet anyway so.

[01:07:07] And by the way an interesting historical fact did you know that you know those skirts that Alice wears an Alice in Wonderland that are almost they come like right down to the ankle and you can see the shoes that style came into fashion immediately after the invention of croquet because women previously were wearing long draping skirts and they would take their ball and hit it and if it didn't go white quite where they wanted they would walk over with her long draping skirts.

[01:07:39] Give it a little kick and so then the man insisted that the fashions change because the women were cheating at croquet. So. So and it's those facts that you really really want.

[01:07:53] The really the silly things that nobody thinks about and all the little details that.

[01:08:00] And so people often ask me if I have a research assistant or if anybody does my research. And. I guess people could check facts for you. You can have a fact checker. But but you can't. You can't ever

[01:08:14] Have anybody who knows what these great little details are. And that's what you want and you can't say to someone go look for great little details you know so because you're the only one who can tell what those are. And for me in Domesday Book. I was looking trying to look for. A really resonant detail that would would bring the catastrophe home you know. And I finally found it when I read that in the little villages in in England and 13 Forty-Eight everybody had a bell and the church bell served a number of purposes. It of course called you did to mass but also I would call you two to go into the fields in the morning to come home at night. If a child was lost in the forest they would ring the bell all night long to orient the kid so they could come home if there was an army coming. They rang the bells to warn everybody. It just served a whole variety of purposes and including funerals. They rang funerals and they rang nine strokes for a man three for a woman one for a baby

[01:09:24] And then a solid hour of tolling.

[01:09:28] After that and so that meant that even in an era of no communication at all when people probably went to only five or ten miles from the place they were born during their whole life they could

hear the plague coming. And they could hear over here. And of course they knew from the sound which towns were which you know in which bells were which they would hear this bell over to the northwest because that's how the plague came from the northwest. And they would ring. There would be ringing a funeral. And then the next day they rang two funerals and then the next day by then the next day there were solid nonstop ringing

[01:10:12] From morning till night but in the meantime the bell here began to ring coming closer and closer and closer and I thought oh that's it.

[01:10:27] That's that's the detail. That's the one where you can really capture the terror and the uncertainty and the lack of knowledge that everybody had. And I you can have a million details but what you really need are just a few like that and to make your work resonate so. But you have to look through all the other facts to find them. That's the bad news. So yes. There will be stories about

[01:10:57] I just have a brand new agent right now a new Hollywood agent. So we'll see. Well thank you. We'll see. Although I will say that in each book that I write I try to do things that you cannot reproduce on film. This may seem counterproductive to you but I guess it is. But my feeling is that movies do some things extraordinarily well. I love movies. I adore movies

[01:11:25] And they do some things way better than books do. But books do some things too that are way better. For instance they do viewpoint better than the movies. The reason they've never been able to make a decent film out of Lolita is not because they can't find a 30 year old who looks 14. It is because it's totally a viewpoint book and it's the most unreliable of all narrators Humbert is lying to you from line one all the way through to the end. And so it's impossible to put that on the screen. They'll never make a decent movie out of it. I don't think although they're getting closer and closer but I've never felt they did a really good job. The same is true of Catcher in the Rye which probably Salinger doesn't want it made into a movie. But I think that would be equally difficult because once again you have an unreliable narrator. I have lots of unreliable narrator and I have and I have people who appear to be one person who are actually another person and I have all kinds of things that I'm not telling you that would be instantly you'd be instantly aware of if you saw it in a movie. So if my work is adapted for the screen it's going to cause all kinds of problems for the screenwriters. And I will not be writing the screenplays. So. Trust me. Yes. Yeah.

[01:12:41] The blitz the blitz. She asked if I could travel in time where would I go. The Blitz. And you know I always give that answer and then I like. Well that's pretty stupid.

[01:12:50] Why would you go why would you go somewhere where you know bombs are raining down on your head all the time. It's my favorite period of history. And that's why I wrote two books about it three books about it. Yeah.

[01:13:05] You're never done. Hi. She asked when you know that you're done with your research you're never done. There's always more to learn and the terrible thing was when I wrote of a blackout an all clear which is by two volume novel about parts of world war 2 and I did heavily research the

intelligence war at Bletchley Park and Dunkirk and the Blitz. And a number of a number of events in the war

[01:13:33] Even scratch the surface and on every every time I turned around there were whole vast new areas opening up of stuff I did not know and things that I wished I knew and things that I would have loved to have in the books. There is no end to no end to research. But as far as what what you mean is I subscribe very much to the sort of iceberg view of research where. You should know everything but the reader doesn't want to hear it. And just because you have spent six years researching. Fabric dyes in the 14 hundreds does not mean that your readers are interested in hearing everything that you have learned so far. And it's all so. I read some books and I think this is like I did this homework and by God you're going to listen to it man.

[01:14:26] So. So I have to leave a lot out so that.

[01:14:32] But you can always say that for another book or you can just just go around and be a you know smart mouth that know all about it. Were your friends so

[01:14:42] Ok. Yes. OK. Yes.

[01:14:44] Right. True that's true. Yeah. She's asking about if work that I've written. If when I wrote it I was focusing on one thing and when I. And then now I it folk has a different focus for me or the things that I read and that's certainly true. I. One thing that I believe very strongly. I have not told my students this so I'm telling you now. If a story

[01:15:06] If you if you write a story and it's true in one circumstance it will always be true and as witness the fact it's 1984 and and handmaid's tale at the top of the bestseller list right now many years after they were written and I read I read a lot of not the short stories of science fiction that were written back in the 50s and go Oh my God how did they know how did they know they are totally echoing situations that we have now that they could not possibly have known about and I one of my most passionate feelings about literature is that it does not have a sell by date.

[01:15:48] A good book is always a good book and styles will change and maybe people don't want to wade through Les Miserables but they'll go see it on Broadway and and then they'll go wade through Miserables and my daughter paid me back for the primeval thing because she had never read the book and she adores Le Mis and appeared in Le Mis. And then when she so she decided she wanted to read the book and she called me at 4:00 in the morning and said Oh my God Mom Fantine just sold her teeth. And I said I know I know I know and it's as sad today as it was the day he wrote it. And it is. And it's as relevant today as the day he wrote it. And if you haven't read Les Miserables I highly recommend that you check it out of the library tonight because it has a great deal to say to us to day at this minute. Well I don't know I haven't checked my phone in a couple of hours so maybe not.

[01:16:49] But I think it's very very relevant. So thank you so much for having me tonight.

[01:17:05] 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.