



Library podcast

Nancy Pearl discusses "George and Lizzie"

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[00:00:36] My name is Edward Wiltshire. I'm the curator of lectures over at Town Hall Seattle and it's a real pleasure for me to be here with you at Seattle Public Library to open up tonight's program with Nancy Pearl who is here to talk about her new book and her first novel George and Lizzie. She'll be in conversation with a wonderful former colleague of mine from Town Hall Seattle Katie Sewell. But before we get to that I have a few thanks and a couple quick announcements to make. Thank you. First and foremost to The Seattle Public Library our host for tonight's events along with the university bookstore who are set up in their table right over there selling copies of Nancy's book as well as some of her great former Books about books. We also thank the Seattle Times for their generous promotional support for library programs and this author series is sponsored by Garry Kunis. Finally this event is supported by The Seattle Public Library Foundation private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community. So to library foundation donors here with us tonight. We thank you very much for your support. Finally I just wanna say a quick thing about town hall. The reason why I'm here tonight thanks so much to Nancy for generously and the library for generously including town hall as a promotional sponsor tonight. This is the first event in what Town Hall Seattle is has formerly code named and we're now coming out to call our inside out season if you familiar with town hall it's a beautiful old church turned into community center just a couple blocks from here.

[00:02:08] And over the next year that building is closed for a wonderful top to bottom renovation. Believe me it's gonna be fantastic when we reopen. But in the meantime we are not stopping programming town halls a year of programs and arts science civics politics and music we'll still be going on but inside out at venues all around Seattle including here at the Seattle Public Library like tonight on Capitol Hill at places like Seattle University and Temple to Hirsch up in north Seattle at some churches in the University District and at Finney neighborhood association and in Southeast Seattle and Columbia city and home and city at the Rainier Arts Center as well as other spots as we come up with them throughout the year. If you're not familiar with town hall you should pick up a copy of our calendars. Our Web site is TownHallSeattle.org. Thank you so much to the library for letting us do that. Ad Sorry to run so long but I just wanted to use this opportunity in this audience full

of book lovers to let you know that while our building is closed we're still here. Please stay in touch with us. We love you. Speaking of people we love. I would love to welcome another former town hall colleague and dear friend Stacia Brandon from the Seattle Public Library to introduce the rest of the program. Hello

[00:03:26] It's me again. Thanks so much Edward. And I know that I am excited to see what town halls cooking up this season. Now we're we're here to see Nancy and Katie not me. So I am delighted to introduce Nancy Pearl and Katie Sewell. I have been lucky enough to call Nancy a friend for I count this up 14 years now and over the years she has recommended thousands of books written several of her own and created amazing programs all over the world that helped connect readers with books and with each other. When she told me that she was thinking of writing a novel I was absolutely thrilled because all of the best writers are readers through and through. And that's who Nancy is at her core she regularly comments on books on NPR's Morning Edition and on KUOW F.M. in Seattle. Lots of you know that she was executive director at the Washington Center for the book here at the Seattle Public Library until 2004 where she created the now super popular One Book One City program. Seattle reads and among Nancy's many honors and awards are the 2011 librarian of the Year award from Library Journal and the 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association. She also hosts a monthly television show Book Lust with Nancy Pearl. Nancy. Talk tonight with Katie Sewell. Katie is a radio producer and host. She's spent well over a decade working at KUOW public radio as a producer and host. Most notably as the lead producer of weekday with Steve share throughout the years she's also worked with Radiolab and toured with a prairie home companion. She's currently co-host and senior producer of the bittersweet Life podcast and a podcast consultant for hire. They will be discussing Nancy's debut novel George and Lizzy Georgian Lizzie is the story of a marriage and the story of how someone grows into themselves and in doing so grows up.

[00:05:27] I absolutely loved it and I'm so excited that you'll get to read it now to please help me welcome Nancy Pearl and Katie so take that.

[00:05:42] Hi everyone. Thanks for coming out on a night when the skies are raining ash down on our city. But more importantly the night when Nancy Pearl's first fiction book enters the world

[00:06:02] I say first of that asking you if you're planning on doing another one. But. I was going to read two reviews that came out very short of what other people are saying and then I'm going to hear what you want to say. So the Washington Post wrote of this book that George and Lizzie is an extraordinary addition to her portfolio a sensitive and entertaining novel and Publisher Weekly writes George and Lizzie is quintessential Nancy Pearl great quirky characters a laugh out loud sense of humor and memorable language and no surprise you can compile a great reading list from of book titles sprinkled throughout the story.

[00:06:42] With that from publishers. Yeah. Publishers Weekly. So those are a few of the initial reviews of the book that I want to know.

[00:06:49] Having been your friend for many years what it's like for you after writing several nonfiction books to actually have your own fiction book out tonight.

[00:06:57] Well it's very weird and it's. And I had a little glass of wine earlier. So it's even more weird. So I. So sometimes people have asked me Are you ever going to write a memoir. And and I'm. I can't write a memoir until my sister dies but. Well. Let's change the focus of the interview because she objected to the introduction to book lists so so.

[00:07:26] So I'm not going to write a memoir but I really always thought that the Book Lust books were my were a memoir because they're really a history of my reading which has always been the center of my life. And so having the book plus books you know having Sasquatch publish them you know Seattle publisher and how wonderful that was. And hearing from readers and all of that that was just so wonderful.

[00:07:50] But having a novel which is not about me you know it is not. I need to say right at the beginning it is not autobiographical.

[00:08:02] I can expound on that but it but it is not.

[00:08:05] It is not autobiographical is so much more personal. You know because these are my characters I mean they feel like they're my children. George and Lizzie and and Marla who is Lizzie's best friend and James who is her husband and whose marvelous husband. So it's so different it's just like apples and oranges.

[00:08:30] And I know that you were nervous for it to come out as well. So now that it's out and all of these people could possibly buy it. How are you feeling more nervous

[00:08:44] Because I know and you know there are students here for my cause I taught at the University of Washington information school for many years and there are a lot of students that I've had and we we talk a lot and in those classes about how everybody reads a different version of the same book that no two people ever read a book the same that you bring yourself in your life and where you are at that moment to the book. And so. And people have different. Different needs from a book that they're reading. You know they they I mean this is why you don't like a book sometimes at a particular time and you'll go back and find that you like it at another time is because you're young you need something from a book that at that moment that particular book is not giving to you. So I feel like I know better than anybody better than many people that there are going to be people who are going to find this book which has a particular narrative structure or you know it's very character driven not the kind of book that they would want to read right now. But I'm hoping that maybe in a month or two I want to read it. And

[00:10:01] At the same point these are your children. Right. So if people say something negative about your body.

[00:10:07] Yes yes. Right. Right. But luckily I'm not reading anything negative. I have a designated negative reader in my house.

[00:10:20] Well let's say let's be introduced to or to some and then we'll go on from here. OK. George and Lizzie.

[00:10:26] So so it's all it's always interesting to me because I've spent so much time interviewing authors how people choose what they're what they're going to read from and did. And I thought when I was thinking about what what section I should read from that the best section would be just the beginning of the book. So you can meet the characters and see what you think and duck and get a sense of the style how they met the night Lizzie and George met.

[00:10:58] It was at the Bola Rameau way out on washed and off. She was flying high on some awfully good weed because her heart was broken for the past several weeks. She'd been subsisting on mugs of Stoli and popcorn. It was Leon Daly who told her that drinking vodka. That had been kept in the freezer was what got you through the bad times Lizzie had known. With a small part of her brain that still seemed to work during the difficult months since Jack McConnell he disappeared from her life. That Leon meant bad times due to football injuries. He was then the right defensive tackle on their high school team but Lizzie figured What the hell. Anything to numb. Anything to mellow. The sadness was worth a try. So vodka taken directly from the freezer and poured seemingly non-stop down Lizzie's throat by Lizzie herself had infected her arms and legs and brain with welcome numbness. She could see how it might even improve her football game. The popcorn was her own idea but Marla tired of the emotional and physical sloppiness of her roommate and best friends drunkenness and engaged as she was to the campus supplier of superior dope as well as being a major pothead himself suggested Lizzie switch good plan after only a few days.

[00:12:25] It was clear to Lizzie that for what she wanted weed was the drug of choice Lizzie had never been in the Bola Ranma or any bowling alley for that matter during the years when she might have gone as a kid. Her parents headed assisted that she le her baby sitter take her to Ballet's museums libraries operas theatres and planetary Ms. Marla had dragged her to the bowling alley because she loved Lizzie and she was exhausted by sharing an apartment with someone whose broken heart still showed no signs of mending. Though months had passed Marla thought that bowling an activity far removed from their normal lives might bring Lizzie to her senses and was she ever right. Lizzie was immediately entranced the noise the swish of the balls hurtling down the alley. Although she didn't yet know it was called an alley the satisfying thanks when the ball reached its targets the excited yips and haze of the bowlers those cunning shoes with the numbers on the back

[00:13:31] The smell of the place a combination of stale beer and sweat and a hint of talcum powder weird those tiny pencils fabulous and those balls some black some zigzagged with colour on the other hand. George was high as a kite on happiness and pride because he was not only out on a date with the current woman of his dreams but he was also about to bowl the best game of his life.

[00:14:00] Since 1982 when he was 12 years old in October of his first year in dental school George developed a serious crush on Julia Dresden. Julia was beautiful and had an intelligence that was said to be stratospheric. It was rumored although never confirmed that she had gone straight into dental school after her junior year at Bryn Ma. She was the subject of both the waking and sleeping dreams of her fellow students some of whom had already dated her. You could see Julia and her current boyfriend at the movies roller blading on spring evenings in Ann Arbor or sitting around in coffee shops talking animatedly. The word on to the street was that she'd go out with you for a few times and then let you down gently while explaining that she didn't intend to get serious about anyone until after she'd established her practice. Several years in the future this left many of her suitors emotionally bereft. George intended to change all this before he finally asked Julia out. He considered several options for what they should actually do on the date. Whatever they did had to be unique and sophisticated or ironically quotidian. That was the main thing. George immediately rejected fishing in the Huron River. Much better for a second or third date. He felt a concert not original enough and that old standby dinner and a movie. Ditto. So what was left. Bowling was left. George would give you odds that now one of their fellow dentists to be had taken her bowling. It would be great right. Even though he himself had not been bowling in let's say almost a decade. But the good times he'd had in bowling alleys were among the many pleasant memories from George's childhood.

[00:15:55] All right. So I'm going to skip ahead because it's it's it's too long. OK. So here's OK. So

[00:16:02] And now Lizzie was at the bowler Ranma stoned on dope from James and George was there stoned unhappiness et cetera et cetera et cetera. Marilyn instructed Lizzie on the intricacies of scoring although she immediately assured Lizzie that she wasn't expecting her to actually keep score. That was that would be Marla's job while Marla talked on Lizzie was mumbling Scopus. Lizzie was mumbling scores spare and strike over and over because she liked the sound of the words in her mouth. Marlowe showed her where to stand and demonstrated how to send the ball spinning down the alley. Lizzie thought Ali was a funny word in this context and added to her monitor. So it now read Ali's score spare strike. Then she decided that it sounded better as SAS score. Ali spares strike. She didn't seem able both to remember those four words in that order and at the same time listen to Marla's explanations. This is likely the reason that she hadn't really gotten the sense of what send the ball spinning down the alley actually meant in any case. It appeared that she interpreted send somewhat differently from how Marla intended she should.

[00:17:22] So I'm going to skip a little bit too. So Lizzie went up to the foul line which Marla had carefully pointed out to her for her first try at bowling. They'd agreed that it was best if Lizzie didn't attempt the much more complicated option of starting further back and taking three strides to the foul line. Neither she nor Marla was confident that Lizzie could coordinate walking carrying the ball counting the steps stopping at the right spot and then throwing the ball especially because she was still occasionally mumbling mumbling score. Allie spare a strike. She stood there with the ball held out in front of her thumb in its correct hole to middle fingers in their ears. Her poems were sweaty. She didn't notice that George was lining up to bowl and in any case was unaware of the protocol that if someone in the lane next to you was getting ready to bowl you should wait until the ball has left his hands to begin your turn. There they both were Lizzie and George in their separate worlds. Surely a

clue to what their future relationship would be. George steps toward the line brings his arm forward and smoothly lets go of his ball and at the same moment Lizzie tries to throw her ball spinning down the alley. But something immediately goes wrong or right depending on what's important to you Lizzie's ball hits the floor with an awesome crash and somehow leaps over the ball return mechanism that separates the lanes and crashes right into Georges ball which until that moment had been rolling straight and true toward what certainly looked like an imminent strike. And now both balls make their separate but causally related ways to the gutter.

[00:19:16] And then it goes on. Well

[00:19:24] I was going to save this for later in the interview but since we started with there being high. After being drunk

[00:19:31] I want to say that part of this book that surprise might be surprising to some of these people is that not only is there a lot of sports in the book there's also a lot of references to Sex in the book and the drugs right which given you're probably persona as a rock star librarian right in Seattle might not be what they're expecting from you.

[00:19:50] Well rock star right. It depends on which you're emphasizing the library and the right to know.

[00:19:58] Yeah I'm just wondering like did you feel any kind of the weight of what people would be maybe expecting from you versus the flaws or delights of your character depending on how you look at it.

[00:20:09] So no I didn't. That is so let me say again this is not autobiographical.

[00:20:20] I Lizzie and I share a love of poetry and we share a love of reading and we share a love of the particular poets that appear in the book. We and so we share a lot of external external parts of our lives. But Lizzie is her own. Person and and so the the way this book happened the way Lizzie and George sort of appeared to me is that I had had. About five or six years ago I had had foot surgery and it was very early on this was done at Northwest Hospital and you know we were there very early early in the morning and the doctor did the surgeries on both feet and it wasn't it was not bunions but it was another kind of surgery. And

[00:21:15] For some reason seems important to me to say it wasn't bunions but I don't know why. So and so when the surgery was done and you know that she sent us home she sent us home with pain meds

[00:21:32] And she had you know she she had given me you know I had taken some pain meds in the hospital just before I left and she said no you know take them every four hours for the pain. So I you know we drove home and you know every four hours I took another pain pill and and that night is

about ten thirty when I sort of made my way upstairs to the bedroom to go to sleep. I turned and said to my husband I said this has been the best day of my life

[00:22:16] And then and then I was lying in bed thinking oh my gosh why couldn't every day be like this day. And. And these two characters came into my head

[00:22:30] And one was George I knew I you know one was George and one was Lizzie and I knew Lizzie's last name it was Boltzmann and I knew where they met. And I even knew they met at a bowling alley in Ann Arbor and I even knew that whole scene of the balls colliding and I didn't know anything else but that's what I knew. And so

[00:22:55] And and so what happened was that for years after that I didn't write anything down but I thought about Lizzie and George all the time and I I just you know they were they became the most real thing and the real people in the world to me and I would you know I go for walks every morning I walk down like 17 by the university in front of those sorority and fraternity houses and I would think oh what would Lizzie think about this. And you know or I would make some cookies and I think oh would Lizzie like these cookies or you know I mean it was all that kind. They were so real to me but I still didn't write anything down. I was just you know I would rewrite I would tell myself at night the stories about Lizzie and George and so by the time I finally sat down and started writing it. It was almost like I was debriefing. You know it's all just there and I was just trying to get it down on paper and and that's when on paper on the computer. And that's when it got hard

[00:24:05] Right. When did you actually admit to yourself finally that you weren't conjuring a book you were actually writing a book so that. So that's a good question

[00:24:15] I think.

[00:24:16] I think that the reason that I sat down and started writing it you know as readers we sometimes go through these lulls where we can't find books that we absolutely you know that are exactly what we're looking for and we you know you must have that experience that you pick up a book and you started and now it's just not for you and you put it down. I think that I had gone through a long period like that or it was in the midst of a long period of not finding a book that I loved and you know my favorite writers were either now Dad like Lori Cole When or weren't writing fast enough like and Tyler or Lorrie Moore you know they.

[00:24:57] And so I just started writing it down for me you know and I just didn't write it.

[00:25:05] I did what I was writing wasn't in any chronological order it was just what was in my head at that moment and I would. And then I would just put it down on paper and then as that sort of pile. More you know that computer file grew. I I thought well maybe this could be a book.

[00:25:26] Is that where the structure of the book comes from there's no there's the book is set up so that they're the chat. There aren't like official chapter breaks it's sort of like short headings that come anywhere on the page and it jumps in time a little bit. Right.

[00:25:41] And so is that how you decided to put it together so yes because I didn't write it in any you know I didn't write it chronologically although the first thing I wrote was the first chapter of the book what became that how how they met but mainly I would just write whatever was at the forefront of my mind. And the great the great thing that that I had a wonderful editor at touchstone books Tara persons and the great thing I think that Tara did was was was say let's make George and Lizzie story in chronological order you know Let's shuffle all these little things that you have and let's make George and Lizzie story in chronological order and then you know there's a lot of going back until Lizzie's childhood. Going into Georgia's childhood various other things about their relationship but we meet Lizzie and George as as the book begins from the moment they meet and then we followed them for about 10 years one of the things I was telling Nancy I was impressed that with this book was that she's pleased with time in a way that I haven't read for a while where she will sometimes tell you how everything's going to work out

[00:27:01] Before you've even heard what she's talking about. I found a very short example. Yes. I'm just not the biggest example in the book of it but you have a line that says even after he got famous George still laughed at zone jokes and at this point we have no idea that George is going to be famous like as far as we know George is just a dentist you know. So. How did that seems tricky to me because you're doing the reveals along the way.

[00:27:28] So that's the cut. So I wrote it.

[00:27:30] I mean I did I really wrote the kind of book that I loved to read. So it's a little bit quirky. You know it has some quirky characters it's not necessarily narratively straightforward and I love

[00:27:47] I love. I love seeing what's going to happen to the characters.

[00:27:52] And then watching it play out. So really everything in the book is is the way I would like that. You know that I like to read that way.

[00:28:04] And I know that.

[00:28:08] So I have to say George is a dentist but he becomes a motivational speaker because because he is just he is married Lizzie and you and I'm not giving anything away but but he's married Lizzie and Lizzie for various reasons that become clear in the book is not an easy person to love. She's you know sort of she's not happy.

[00:28:37] I was going to say said Yeah yeah. She's not she's not particularly happy and she's doesn't believe in love and she certainly doesn't believe in marriage and George has this very you know if you read the review in The Seattle Times which was just so wonderful and a little bit anti George which

which is great because because George is forgetting entirely too much you know. Appreciation from various people. Let me say

[00:29:09] So. So. So George becomes a motivational speaker because he believes that everything is an opportunity for growth and he tries to convince Lizzie that she could be happy if she accepts that that everything is an opportunity for growth.

[00:29:27] And Lizzie fights him every every inch of the way you know through the last page of the book. But George becomes a very famous motivational speaker writes many books you know very popular on college campuses and is you know many people's guru but you know Lizzie is his one failure. And she takes pride in that.

[00:29:52] When you say yes. Absolutely. I mean another thing that you're doing too is that you often will put a character's perspective in even though it's not told like look it's not a story told from Lizzie's point of view but I've filled another one so this is like where you're telling her perspective. But it's not told from her point of view. This is what you wrote. They were exactly at the right heights so that they could walk with Blake's arm around Alice. Alice's waist and her head on his shoulder.

[00:30:21] They were in step left foot right foot left foot. Not missing a beat. It was disgusting really. Well that's Lizzie who says it was disgusting. I have to say that I had the I got to read the audio book

[00:30:39] Which was just a wonderful experience too for me to do that. And you know Blake and Alicia Those are George's best George's best friend from Tulsa. And his girlfriend and then wife Alisha. And you know Alicia's you know blonde and very perky and she goes to Oral Roberts University and. You know Lizzy just thinks she's like. And I named her after an Alicia that I really dislike

[00:31:16] I'm not going to say that anyplace else but I will say that here not it's not in Seattle. It's not a Seattle Alicia right.

[00:31:25] Well so since we're well we have about 10 minutes before I'm going to open the floor to any questions but I do want to get into the literary aspects of this. Oh good. First I want to start with your own advice if you know anybody who's paid attention to Nancy Pearl for years knows that she believes that when it comes to reading time is short and that if you aren't in love with a book by the 50 pages in you should just put it down and start something else. Right. Never plow through the end. And that that 50 pages gets shorter and shorter.

[00:31:53] The older you get like we have to read less and less so I was just wondering does that put an extra pressure when you're writing a fiction book that that first 50 pages has got to be a top notch chop.

[00:32:07] Not right. Right. You know I just didn't never think about. I really didn't think when I was putting this all down when I was typing all of this that

[00:32:19] That it would be judged. You know I was the only judge of it. And. And I was kind of doing what I wanted to do but I'm very happy to say that like page 50 is really good on this. Like on page 50 begins this section called what we need to know about George

[00:32:45] And it and it begins I'll just give this little. George rarely got annoyed at anyone. Never at his patients even if they obviously weren't flossing enough

[00:32:58] And it got an end. And so here's how like here's how.

[00:33:04] Like that. They came. Here's an example of like how they came to me and I was like powerless to do anything but write but write their lives down as they kind of told me about it which was that I don't even I apologize in advance to any Georgia's here. But it's not a name that I would have chosen for a character if I had the choice. I mean if I were like making up a character his name wouldn't be George. I don't think you are making up the character not but it didn't feel that way. I know that's what's weird. It sounds very woo woo but it isn't. And George is a dentist and and and I've no dentists in my family but it I found it very easy to make up dental jokes.

[00:33:50] Yes Nancy's always been a big fan of the pun in my experience and the many puns. What's the joke you wanted to say about that door.

[00:33:58] Oh you remember when Stella was saying that the door is not going to be a door. That reminded me of that joke about when is a door not a door when it's a jar. Yeah.

[00:34:08] Yeah. We were going to open that way and we forgot. It's crazy. So these books

[00:34:16] In your true one of the things I've always marveled about you is your ability to remember oh did you have a pen you wanted to read I'm sorry. No no no no no no. It's your ability to remember authors what they wrote. You know the book substrate been one part of the magic of what you did when you were on weekday all the time and I'm on rest of NPR and your characters. Same way they they are Lizzie's always reading and I think it's her best friend that knows how to recommend the perfect gift for somebody who actually can pull the perfect book. If you're giving a Christmas present to somebody you've never met before right.

[00:34:49] But she does also include like a possibility of giving a Harry and David fruit fruit back right. So I was wondering

[00:35:00] You know their behavior is influenced by books your characters are. Do you find that your behavior is also influenced by things that you read. Was that an intentional thing that you did.

[00:35:09] Well I mean Katie nothing was intentional. It's just like how it was. I don't know how to explain that any better.

[00:35:17] Well what about for you personally. Me as my you here the lines of people you read run through your head.

[00:35:24] Yes I do. Well do I. I certainly can you know bring quotes to mind occasionally and I can certainly remember particular scenes that

[00:35:41] You know that are sometimes relevant and sometimes I'll just say them anyway because they're so great and whether they're relevant or not. Yeah yeah.

[00:35:49] What about this is going to get really deep into the book. Okay. There if you read all the way to page 130. The characters get into a conversation about how one work of one author can influence how another author is read and the example that they give. Is that Emily Dickinson makes you just shift how you experience Shakespeare. Are you familiar with. Right.

[00:36:15] So now now. Okay. Go ahead. Now go. If you use.

[00:36:20] So what I was going to say is that I actually read that in a book and that's what I refer to that one that one of the Lizzie has read that in a book and she's testing out that theory on George. Yeah and yeah.

[00:36:33] And is that something that you have found true for you.

[00:36:36] Yeah I think it's true. I mean I think it sounds bizarre to say that Emily Dickinson influenced Shakespeare. But I think that the way that we read Shakespeare is influenced by our knowledge of it because every every generation read Shakespeare differently. And and Emily Dickinson was you know. Maybe this isn't making any sense on page 130 it makes perfect sense. Let me tell

[00:37:09] But I mean it doesn't stand to reason that that people could be read your book totally differently based on whatever they read before just from your experience.

[00:37:19] Well I think Oh yeah.

[00:37:23] I don't know. Thank you both. Rein it in.

[00:37:27] Yeah. Reminds me. We did this experiment on the radio where remember when we used to have people call in and try to say how did one book lead to another ask for another and another.

[00:37:40] I'd still like to do that. Yeah. Yeah. How does one thing influence another right.

[00:37:45] Another thing. How you choose your next read. That's really interesting. So if you were gonna choose your next read after reading George and Lizzy what would I Where would you go so.

[00:37:54] So I would go to the short stories of Lorrie Moore particularly a book called birds of America or I would. I would go to an older and Tyler novel called Searching for Caleb. And if you haven't read either one of those. Absolutely.

[00:38:14] Why was the king Why.

[00:38:15] So the connection is that and Tyler for many many many many years was my all time favorite writer I think she is a fabulous writer wonderful quirky characters and searching for Caleb is my favorite of her books and Lorrie Moore's collection of short stories birds of America is probably one of the best written books that I've ever ever read.

[00:38:42] Now I know this organically grew out of you. Yes the characters but were there certain writers that you've you recognize sort of their style in your own style. Gosh I would say not directly but I think that

[00:39:04] That that being a reader for my whole life it's certainly made me write this kind of a book and that writers like Laurie Cole When CIOL DWI and especially her short stories and her novel shine on bright and dangerous object or a more current writer Catherine Heaney HDI NY who wrote a collection of short stories called Single Carefree Mellow or single mellow carefree.

[00:39:32] One of those you know those those kinds of books which are humorous and and our deal with relationships are we're very influential.

[00:39:45] All right I'm going to open the floor in just a moment but I want to ask two more things. So everybody prepare your questions. The first one I want to ask you is since you me you've spent you know a lot of your career recommending books to others. Is it possible for you to recommend a book to George and one to Lizzie

[00:40:06] Oh my gosh.

[00:40:10] No. Here's why. Because the only way that you can really do a good job recommending a book to somebody is by talking to that person and asking them what they liked about her particular book. Tell me about a book that you liked. That's what I would always say.

[00:40:27] And I and so no.

[00:40:32] Ok.

[00:40:32] And then I'm not unless they step out of the book and yeah. And I guess my final question would be after. Interviewing so many authors I'm sure it's the question everybody asks you What was it like when this showed up at your house in a

[00:40:48] Printed form. You know it was it was just I just thought that that that the love that that day would never come. I mean you know it's such a long process and you know the book gets bought if if you're fortunate and then you you know the edit the editor sends you a letter saying what you know what changes she thinks the book needs and then you do those and it always takes so much longer to get a response from the editor and I would ask my friend Danielle who is responsible really for getting the book published. Yes you are. Danielle. You know how come it's taking so long and she would explain that everything at a publishing company you know is done in order and you know they deal with the books that were gonna be published in August before they're going to deal with this. So it just seems to take so long. And and by the time you finally get it it almost seems like it's a book by somebody else you know.

[00:41:54] Yeah.

[00:41:55] And we are lucky. You need. You're lucky if you get one that looks like you want it to look with the edging that she wanted so badly right. Yeah. Yeah. Do you think that this is your only work of fiction.

[00:42:08] Well I think that I need time to to sort of take in all this great fun. What I think I would like to write maybe is because the characters were all born

[00:42:24] Around when you were born. They were born around the late 1960s early 1970s. So in 2017 they'd all be pretty close to 50. And and I think it would be really interesting to look at some of the the minor characters and see what they're doing now.

[00:42:46] Thanks Martha. Thank you.

[00:42:47] I didn't ask for now it's your turn to ask questions.

[00:43:00] Andrea in the pink sweater and myself are going to run the mikes to you though so that we can pick your brilliant insightful question up for the recording that we're making. So I would say you get to raise your hands.

[00:43:12] Nancy will pick and then we'll run unless you want us to pick you. Sophie's Choice now OK. OK.

[00:43:20] Questions when we see went right over there what is maverick up to.

[00:43:29] Oh so what is maverick up to so some maverick was Lizzie's boyfriend in her junior year of high school and maverick grew up in Ann Arbor and his father was a professional football player and he had the father head it was now coaching at the University of Michigan football team and maverick has two younger brothers and the father laments that maverick who is a wide receiver is good but not great.

[00:44:02] And the second son Ranger is great but not outstanding. And so all the family's hopes are placed in the youngest brother. And so that's one of the questions that I'm really interested in thinking that I've been thinking about before I go to sleep at night is how how how maverick at age 50 who is now a sports writer and on a football podcast you know how he's dealing with that sort of fallout from his father's being a disappointment to his father so that's the kind of thing I'm interested in writing about.

[00:44:43] How about you. I'll pass the mike to you.

[00:44:48] Nancy what was the inspiration for Lizzie's football scheme.

[00:44:54] Oh. Oh yeah. So so that's hard to talk about because I don't want to give anything away. So I think I won't answer that.

[00:45:06] I talked to her after the event. Right.

[00:45:16] I have another question over here.

[00:45:20] What was the most difficult part of writing the book for you. Oh that's a great question.

[00:45:25] So the most difficult part of writing the book was when I actually sat down and started typing on my computer and a sentence and remember I'd been saying these sentences over and over for years in my head and a sentence would sound absolutely wonderful in my head. And the minute it would be up on the computer screen it would just seem like the worst sentence I had ever written. And I would and I'm. I'm. I was like ferociously critical of myself

[00:46:06] And my writing and I know that the the conventional wisdom is when you're writing a novel write a first draft and get it down and then tinker with it after after that. But I couldn't do that. I was rewriting every single sentence as I was putting it down. And. And. And and so there's just sort of this barrage of self-criticism that I would go through because I would write a sentence like George took Lizzie's arm. Which is a perfectly okay sentence. Then I would think. Well where did he take it.

[00:46:49] What did she do with one arm.

[00:46:52] You know like how do I deal with that. I mean you know I'm sort of. That's kind of a funny example but really every single line was like fighting with myself

[00:47:03] To let it be. And I was really lucky that I had some friends that I could sort of send things to and say Does this sound you know I mean is this is badly written as I think it is.

[00:47:20] And I think you need to I I think from my experience in this book particularly I think you need to have this balance between believing in in your work and also recognizing that an editor can really help you make it even better. And and I had to get to that point of it was torture trying to write

because because of that translation from my mind to the screen it was hard. That's why it took so long. And then the other thing that that was hard was that

[00:48:04] I never considered that it would be published. I mean that was not for a long time it wasn't. That wasn't why I was writing it. And so I wasn't concerned with you know continuity in that particularly or I didn't have like a list of the characters in when they were born. I remember very late in the process sending to my editor you know a bunch of e-mails saying well here's when they were all born and here's when. You know here's their birthdays and you know other things like that and then saying if I were a real writer I probably would have done this right at the beginning but I didn't. I did it very close to the end and then I had to keep all the football players straight. You know I had to keep twenty three football players you know and and you know I had to

[00:48:58] You know what position they were playing and all of that. So all of those things I didn't. I was just doing it because I loved these characters and I loved thinking about them Hi Nancy.

[00:49:16] Did you have other characters who came to you before these did like when you were younger.

[00:49:22] Are they still around. Yeah. I did not. I wrote a lot of poetry in high school and especially in college and then the poetry lines that used to come to me is as poetry started coming as prose but I've never had the experience of having these two characters these just so clearly be there and and and continue to sort of be with me.

[00:49:54] Hi Nancy I'm wondering having written this book is it changing or how is it affecting how you're reading other authors and how you're thinking about other authors.

[00:50:05] Oh that's a good question too. You know there's a book that came out a few years ago called reading like a writer reading a novel like a writer I think.

[00:50:16] So what it's done for me now is that it's made me much more aware of the choices that writers make at every point in their books. And so I'll be reading and I'll see something happen. And I'll say to myself Oh they're doing she's doing that because later on that's going to come up and partly I think I noticed that because that wasn't the way this book came to me. You know really felt like in this book I made no decisions.

[00:50:55] You know I made no. It was all it was all sort of

[00:51:00] Foretold in a very strange way and and the first section of the book you know how they met in the last section of the book which is the end of many things. Those are pretty much exactly how I wrote them.

[00:51:20] So but I do read differently now. It's it's very interesting to me I

[00:51:30] Do you remember. Can you describe the experience of writing the last word the o the X O

[00:51:42] Yeah. I do read the last paragraphs of both the last sentence of books frequently so so. So I

[00:51:54] I had always thought that this book would end very differently.

[00:51:59] I mean I thought you know it's a story of a relationship between two people who are very different from one another and really inhabit different worlds. And

[00:52:09] And I had a lot of questions about how they could be married and how they could remain married with that you know having that being so different and so and so the closer I got to trying to write that last section the less I wanted to write it because yeah I thought this was going to happen but that's not what I wanted to happen. And so I I stopped writing for a long time. That's what also made it take a long time to sort of finish it. And then I kind of had to wait for George and Lizzie to kind of tell me what was going to happen.

[00:52:56] And so the last sentence the last lines are the last words in here the last word is actually home.

[00:53:04] And the end that's I think a I think that's a nice last word for a book.

[00:53:12] I answered their question.

[00:53:15] Oh hi Nancy. So I know you talked about these characters coming to you kind of almost on their own. And you also talked about that. You don't have any dentists in your family for instance right. Curious what pieces of the book you found you had to do outside or outside research for if any.

[00:53:33] Oh you know so that's so interesting because so what pieces of the book did I have to do outside research for.

[00:53:43] So I went to college in Ann Arbor. Like a little like Lizzie did. But she lived in a dorm that I did not live in. So I had to use but I. So I had to use like Google Earth. To kind of see where the dorm was and how she would walk across the campus.

[00:54:02] So there was that kind of research and there is a little bit about the Holocaust in here.

[00:54:12] Lizzie's grandparents are affected by that.

[00:54:19] And so I did a little bit of research about that. But it's so amazing that all this stuff that you used to have to go to a library to you know and look for the books you can basically you know sit and do from home. That doesn't mean libraries aren't needed because they're needed now more than ever.

[00:54:41] We have a question over here.

[00:54:46] Thanks. So you've you've recommended so many thousands of books over the years and I'm wondering what it was like for you when it came time for you to get blurbs for your own book. Yeah. Was it difficult or were people clamoring to write good words for Nancy Pearl. So I said the question was about blurbs and and. Blurbs

[00:55:20] So so for many people when they heard I had a novel coming out they said I'd love to read it and blurb it which was just wonderful. And and one of the people who said that was the mystery writer Lisa Scott Illini. Some of you might read her. So I've known Lisa Scott Illini for many years in 2005. She picked the second book lust book More Book Lust to be the today Book Club pick at that time.

[00:55:52] The Today Show was doing a book club and and her book had been chosen the month before and then she got to choose the next one so she chose a more Book Lust.

[00:56:01] And she and so they've The Today Show you know flew me into New York and we were on television together and I always remember that she was wearing this beautiful Chanel real Chanel jacket. It was it was like amazing and you know that. And her books are so you know so much fun. They're thrillers and they're so much fun. And so when she was in in Seattle I interviewed her the last time at university bookstore and I said you know what.

[00:56:28] I have this book that I finished and it's coming out and she said I want to read it and blurb it. I said oh it's not a mystery. And she said Oh that's OK that's OK. And then she read it and wrote this lovely blurb which is on the back of the book. But then she wrote me this long letter and in the letter she said she said I just loved the book and I loved you know I just loved the characters blah blah blah but I wish I could meet a George.

[00:56:59] So I thought well that was very nice Jim Lynch who who I think is one of the best writers writing in writing today and we're so lucky to have him in Seattle was generous enough to read an early early ish collection of these sections and then he blurb it as well. So it's scary. It's I thought it was very scary to to ask.

[00:57:29] It's not easy for me to ask somebody to do something for me. In any case and to do something like this was was heard we have time for just one more question. A lot of authors in their acknowledgment think their long suffering spouse and children for putting up with. Their

[00:57:54] Emotions or whatever times in a way while writing their book. So was this experience hard on your husband. What would he say

[00:58:08] We could we could ask him. But let's not so.

[00:58:18] So I've always I've always dedicated all all my books to tip to my husband Joe.

[00:58:24] And in this one and this and this was this came out like our like our fifty first anniversary was last week. So that's a long time to be married.

[00:58:37] Applause I was 11.

[00:58:47] He was a little bit older so I don't think it made any difference in his life at all.

[00:58:54] My writing this book. No no it did he. I asked. He Lizzie's parents are. I'll do this very quickly. Lizzie's parents are psychologists their behavioral psychologist. You know like Skinner and all of that. And and and Joe happens to be a psychologist but not a behavioral psychologist.

[00:59:15] And so I could ask him many many many many. So he gave me many many words of advice. And help and I could not have written the book without him. And that is truth.

[00:59:34] And to God. Thank you so much Katie and thank you so much Nancy Pearl. Let's give them one more round of applause

[00:59:48] 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.