



Library podcast

Calvin Gimpelevich and Friends: 'Trans Writers'

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[00:00:36] Hi everybody. It's so nice to see you. I'm Stesha Brandon. Thanks for being here tonight. I'm the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at The Seattle Public Library. Welcome to this evening's program with Calvin Gimpelevich, Genesis Ellis and Susan Brittain. I wanted to thank our author series sponsor Garry Kunis and give thanks to the Seattle Times for their generous promotional support of library programs. Thank you two for culture for their support of this program as well. And finally we are grateful to 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 say thank you very much for your support. Before we get started I have a few additional announcements I wanted to mention that we have a couple of options for restrooms tonight. There are binary gendered restrooms out of this store and toward the back of the building on Level 1. And we recommend that you use the restroom that aligns with your gender identity for patrons who don't feel safe using the binary gendered restroom as we have two single user restrooms that we're making available and to access those you'd go past this piano and Miranda's staff member here will direct you to where those those restrooms are. Thanks for your patience as the library works to create a better long term solution to serve our transgender patrons. We are recording tonight's program for the library podcast.

[00:02:04] If you haven't done so already please take a minute to silence your phones. And if you would like to listen again you can look for tonight's podcast on our website. In just a couple of weeks you received a survey when you came in. This is an opportunity for you to make your voice heard. We're interested in knowing a bit more about you and what you'd like to see here at the library. So if you take a minute to fill it out and then you can return it in that little basket on that table there. I read every state survey and I'm interested in knowing what you think. I'm excited to welcome you to tonight's program trans writers reads with Calvin Genesis and Susan I think our first reader tonight will be Susan Britton. Susan has lived on two continents in two genders and sailed the bays and oceans as a tall ship captain for over 30 years or near London England. She emigrated to the US in 1980 and now enjoys a quieter life ashore working in Port Townsend at the Writers Workshop an imprint bookstore. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications including a potpourri of poetry and

prose. The tide pools magazine and word with you press. She and her wife are actively involved in the LGBTQ community in Port Townsend and we're part of the 2014 documentary just gender. They both lectured at colleges and congregations across the US. Please help me welcome Susan Britton.

[00:03:25] Good evening and thank you ever so much for coming out tonight. Could we read you three pieces and do a little bit of an introduction with each piece.

[00:03:33] The first piece is just called Paul. It's about my oldest brother. I was one of four boys and my oldest brother was someone that I've always looked up to and still do today. And this is a piece that I wrote for him as a young boy. I was mesmerized by Atlas holding the earth on his shoulders. Why had he taken on such an impossible task. And Paul why are you the oldest brother the protector. I know you had no choice it was your job as the oldest. I don't recollect when you became my atlas. But I remember how how that night at 2:00 in the morning as drunkard feet pounded on stairs as lights came on as slaps flew onto helpless bodies. You stood unmoving and told Dad to leave I never thanked you as you lay awake listening to the stifled sobs of your three trembling brothers. You with your own silent burden of being the oldest brother lay still unmoving wondering how you were going to save us. How when my outer voice screamed as I was dragged out of the House pleading not to go to that all boys school you can't our parents as they argued over who was going to spanking me as my fingers clawed at walls. How is my inner voice became an inferno. Its flames Karen insults. I'll kill you. You're not my father. I hate you all you present to put out those fires you listened cared and said it was gonna be all OK how in England in 2013 Susan for the first time I sat in the old family living room with my eyes closed whilst the smells of the House besieged me in the dark oceans of memories at times crushing at other moments.

[00:05:28] Boy I listen to you. You were working in the kitchen making tea. Your actions as always were careful and precise you've had years to hone these traits first taught to us years before by our alcoholic parents. Don't make noise. Who's that banging around someone's enforced bank in the placing of cutlery. The quiet filling of the kettle. The opening of cupboards. All done with muted restraint tea anyone

[00:06:01] Just like a bird with its own song. Your call has always been a common sing song rhythm how I know your aim in life was not to put out fires and rescue lost souls as our family was shook to its foundation. Alcoholism divorces broken trusts and hurt bodies. But you stood by us each brother tended by you with loving care. Your successes are junior Wimbledon tennis player. The treasurer of the Norfolk County a father husband brother an uncle were these just distractions diversions from your main calling of the rescuer. Is that why you've hiked thousands of miles and open trails through Europe. Are you on a pilgrimage or fleeing from life. How when I wrote the letter. Explaining that I could no longer live in a man's body. You became my advocate

[00:06:59] A sister in a family an aunt instead of an uncle. We can handle this. It was you who paved the way for the others in the family to accept and embrace me and how in 2013 as we stroll through the streets of Norwich. You put your arm around me in public and still to this day the only man ever to do so. My mother passed away this year at the age of 95. She was an incredible incredible woman

and this is a piece I wrote after her death. It's called the last squeeze the small frail hand wraps around my thumb it's weathered fingers still retain and a semblance of strength I ask her if she's feeling okay. And two quick squeezes of my thumb are her reply as I sit with my mother on this night. I realize this is how we were introduced on another June night 60 years ago when I was born my first attempt to communication with her would have been my small hand wrapped around her finger and squeezing in just as we're doing now. When vocal communication isn't possible touch makes everything right my wife Cindy and I have been maintaining a bedside vigil now for five nights. The mother collects her thoughts and summons up the courage to move on to the next stage of life. For the last few days she's chatted and hummed recited nonsense rhymes from a childhood winced with pain and let tears flow with frustration as I seem to sink 60 years ago that there was something bigger than my mother's womb and pushed my way into the world.

[00:08:47] My own mother seems to sense that something bigger awaits Daub her lips once more with water using a small cotton swab and then take a hand again. She gives it a squeeze to say thank you I've held this hand so many times but never paid attention to it. It's a hand that guided me as I lifted my first spoonful of food to my mouth. It helped me as I grew frightened on stormy nights at my first sight of the ocean of a steam engine arriving at the platform. My first day of school my last day of school at the airport as I left England on my wedding day. As I showed my son for the first time as he took my hand and squeezed it then as I became Susan she took my hand as we entered the courthouse to change my name. I was 54. She was 89. She's never let go. And now at 3 in the morning as she squeezes my thumb. I realize that though I am confident her she is also comforting me and I hear her voice telling me that all will be well so part of my introduction I you've probably heard that I was a tall ship captain for 35 years.

[00:10:06] I used to be known as Captain Bob and this is my wife Cindy with the white hair up front here. We've been married for 35 years and we met on schooners down in the Caribbean many many years ago. Anyway the piece I wrote tonight is just part of a memoir that I'm working on right now. It's called One Day Susan I promise and this piece is called First night out and it's about sailing on a schooner through the Caribbean in 1981 probably before many of you were born actually looking at the crowd tonight.

[00:10:39] So here we go. The anchor breaks the surface scout and clean from the bright sands of the Caribbean Sea. The battle of the 130 foot schooner falls off onto a broad reach as sails are set and she begins to roll in the building seas as we clear the lee of the island of Grand Cayman. Our destination Galveston Texas.

[00:11:02] We watch we catch the front edge of a low pressure system that carries us quickly west to the straits before pointing the bell north west to take us through its unpredictable waters. The four first night out. We what we come on deck at twenty two hundred hours and we met with the two eight and whether the ship takes a role to Wynwood. The boat plunges and ship water runs ankle deep across the deck. Waterborne bioluminescence glowing fluorescent green streak across the deck in all directions and then washed to leeward with decks couples washed them back into the ocean the wind has been building as has the sea. And soon the one hundred and thirty foot schooner is starting to

struggle with the task of driving this north west with the last live with the moon disappearing below the horizon. We're left with a tempestuous night. I'm told to carry our deck inspection as soon as we relieve the other watch moving from one handhold to the next. I work my way steadily forward to check that nothing is amiss with the schooner as a ship shudders and rolls and a large wave crest hisses by my feet become entangled in a loose line that has been swept off its belay and pin for say a lower leech line out of its running block.

[00:12:19] I shall as my flashlight pinpoints the block aloft where the line should have been led. This is the second largest sail on the schooner and if we need to reach the sail the line needs to be relayed immediately. The first made his next to me in an instant and snatches the line out of my hand. God damn it. What also didn't lead this off properly was a you at three in the morning. My only reply is the lost watch that always sloppy the mate turns and shouts aft volunteer to go aloft before he can say another word. I had a line in my hand and I'm at the base of the 80 foot Douglas fir mast ready to scurry aloft. This is normally a simple climb using the mast hoops that hold the cell to the mast for foot. But tonight the hoops are covered with grease used to prevent chafing on the wooden mast the schooner takes another roll to windward and the maid screams to hang on as the ship reaches the end of its sway and the rig starts to return to lured. I see my chance and jump on to the first hoop climb frantically Olof passed a line through its block put the bitter end of the line in my teeth and quickly returned to deck I find a firm footing on deck as the ship returns to its wild wood roll I timed it perfectly athlete the line quickly on the belay and pin but realize it's been led improperly and will not run free.

[00:13:43] A wasted trip we pull the line back to deck and get it ready to be sent back aloft the darkness and the constant waves breaking on deck. Make this difficult by now everyone on watch except for the maid. Think we should wait till daylight. Why do I get to sail with you lot. The maid screams as he tells me to go back up and do it right. Five minutes later we had the line coiled and free to run. As I step onto the first hoop again it's now slippery with grease but using other handholds I start to climb bracing my body as the ship now starts to roll and pitch with greater frequency. This time it takes me five minutes to reach the block Reeve the line and get ready to climb back down a gust and a shift of wind drives a schooner of course and a sudden roll to windward leaves my legs dangling in midair. I regain my footing and look down to see the deck completely awash as waves swamped the ship.

[00:14:42] The schooner finishes roll to windward slips off a wave and heads off down wind at the same time the heavy sail canvas lashes across the boat and flex me. I can't for the life of me fathom what can wallop me that hard nor pry my fingers loose so easily. My body is hurled into the black darkness where I find myself suspended and just for a split second I'm aware of being only twenty three years old before I fall. Someone once told me it's not the full and that hurts when you stop how right they are. Providence is the leeward wall of a ship Providence is a piece of rope hitting my leg spinning me in midair and change in the direction of the fall. Providence is a 17 foot wooden long boat strapped amid ship's on deck. That breaks my fall as I bounce off it from fully five feet above and slump onto the deck Providence is not being sucked into the black Christian wave that wants to

sweep me overboard and down to Davy Jones locker the resting place of all sailors drowned at sea. I like crumpled and unmoving a heap of foul weather gear and seabirds Thank you Susan.

[00:16:01] Our next reader is Gen. Ellis Gen.. Ellis is a two spirited by gender and queer public speaker organizer and writer in what they call the aloof loner tradition. They go by many names and many pronouns. He's an agoraphobic who lives with his partner and a tiny dog named DeeDee. In her spare time she enjoys making mixed medium art collage about what it means to be a queer femme in the Pacific Northwest. Please help me welcome Gen. Ellis.

[00:16:28] Hi everyone. Thank you for coming. I'm going to be reading a piece from my memoir that is as yet untitled but the piece I'm reading from it is called the sociopath that tried to get down my pants do you have any feelings you'd like to share with the group. Fuck you all. I hate it here.

[00:16:53] I said my legs curled up occupying the smallest space possible on the corner of an otherwise unoccupied couch the House the meeting was in full swing. The live in counselor had just regaled us all with the excruciatingly boring exploits of his Canadian curling team. No doubt something he had prepared to say earlier that had been on his list of safe topics to share across from me is that my ex-boyfriend Kevin he snickered at the comment the rest of the House stayed silent.

[00:17:24] Their eyes glazed over and fixated on different spots on the wall each dreading their own turn to share feelings to my other side and a Big Smoochy armchair was Angel the sociopath our eyes locked briefly and he smiled. Would you like to talk about why you hate it here. The living asked in his best non confrontational tone. Why do I have to come to these meetings I asked.

[00:17:50] Everyone has to come to the weekly meetings. House rules. He then went over all the House rules again. No guests overnight no guests during the day without putting it on the guest sign up sheet. No sleeping in other housemates rooms or hanging out after 10:00. No locked doors. No food in your room. Weekly meetings with the House biweekly one on one meetings with the live in. No drugs no alcohol. Do your chores I spent the rest of the meeting thinking about how I'd already broken all of these rules and how I would break them again most likely with my ex boyfriend Kevin. We'd reconnected after discovering that we'd both been roped into living in transitional mental health housing for at risk youth. It was run by christians which had not been explicitly explained to us how do we have known. We probably both would have stayed on the streets. The house was in a pseudo ritzy Jewish neighborhood in Seattle. We were very aware that the neighborhood hated us and didn't want us there as we were often carefully told by the live in to be quiet and not interact with the neighbors my housemates included a paranoid schizophrenic who couldn't stop picking the scabs all over his body.

[00:19:05] A girl with OCD who could easily be tricked into finishing your chores. Kevin who I'm pretty sure was terminally emo an angel the sociopath I was the only autistic which I was quick to point out wasn't actually a mental health disorder. Yes but you're still at risk. The living would chime with a fatherly nod. The first time the sociopath tried to get down my pants. We were at a bus stop. I'd been waiting at the stop and he casually walked by slowed down then backed up. Mind if I wait for the bus

with you. He asked. Sure Angel's skin was the color red clay. His eyes unmistakably dark and his pitch hair falling into his face. He talked into my ear as if we were sharing intimate secrets even though nobody else was there. I like curvy girls. He said his voice soft and matter of fact. I'm not sure I am a girl I said. Are you sure about this. He grabbed my chin and stole a deep kiss. No. I said Well then I guess I'll just have to keep trying till you're sure. We made out for what seemed like hours. Our hands couldn't decide if they wanted to hold each other or not. The bus came and went several times. We stopped intermittently to chat about the medications we were on.

[00:20:22] The medications we wished we were on and the medications we didn't want to be on anymore. I'm a sociopath you know I'm incapable of feeling he said after a while. Then I want to make love to you. How can you make love to me if you don't have feelings I asked. With my bottom lip still partially connected to his unable to break away what I got to sweep you off your feet to fuck. He cut to the eyebrow playfully. Yes that's exactly it. I don't think I can have sex without romance or feelings. Romance huh. He said the gears in his head seeming to spin. I can do that. He left suddenly leaving me wondering and breathless. I didn't see Angel again for a whole week. He was enviously absent from the next house meeting as was Kevin. How come they get to skip. I asked. The live frankly. Kevin is seeing his psychiatrist and Angel made prior arrangements with me to live and responded. Would you like to talk about your feelings this week. Fuck you all. I hate it here. Meeting as usual. Later I got a call from Angel. Hello. Hello sweetheart. It's your boyfriend. Hi. Hi. How did you get my number. I'm your lover. It's my job to know these things.

[00:21:39] Where were you at the meeting tonight. I asked deciding to ignore his comment on being my lover. I was getting things ready for wait for you want to come to my room. We're not supposed to hang out in each other's rooms after 10:00 o'clock. That's never stopped any of us before. Come over honey. I want to show something to you. We hung up and I spent a few minutes sitting on my bed in my room breathing really hard. I was pretty sure I was gonna get raped but I was also pretty sure I was going to go anyways. I crept out into the hallway first making sure the live in was in his room. You could always tell he was about to go to bed. When you heard cheesy guitar filtering out from under his door good not only would he not hear but he would be putting himself to sleep soon. What a boring loser I thought. I tiptoed downstairs casting a glance towards Kevin's room. There was a sliver of light underneath that meant he was home and would come if I screamed. But I had already decided I would not scream. So really it didn't matter. There was familiar music coming from the other side of Angel's door. Curiously I knocked the door opened.

[00:22:48] I stepped in and the room was warm. Angel closed the door behind me. There were candles lit everywhere and he was playing my favorite vertical Horizon seedy. A guilty pleasure band Leftover from my childhood. This led me to wonder how long he had been stalking me and how often he'd been into my room.

[00:23:06] I had to give it to him. He was a professional. There were Rose puddles all over the bed and on the floor read. I expected him to take my clothes off but instead he took off his shirt unbuttoning it slowly. I have something to show you he said and I bit back the urge to say something snarky when his shirt was off. He cast it carelessly to the side and turned around. I gasped. His back

was covered in burn scars swirly red and purple alien like they covered his entire back and streaks flashed across his shoulders and ran down his thighs. It was absolutely gorgeous. Can I touch it. I asked. Yeah. It doesn't hurt anymore. It was a long time ago. What happened.

[00:23:51] He told me the story of how his father nearly beat his mother to death. Then went to pour a large basin of boiling water all over his 11 year old body. He had tried to run away but it splashed against his back I ran my hands over the scars gently as he told me his story mesmerized not so much by the horror of his tale but by the intricate designs they made and their texture. Suddenly I found myself holding him tightly against me. His scarred flesh seared against my chest and he was calling me baby and turning around to embrace me.

[00:24:26] When he started pulling me towards the bed I pulled away. I don't know if I can do this. I kind of just got out of a relationship with a sociopath. I said Did he hurt you. Angel asked. Yeah. He kind of did like kind of a lie. Did he rape you. Yes. Well I'm not gonna do anything you don't want to do. I might not have feelings but I'm not a monster which get this seedy. Did you steal it from my room. My eyes narrowed. No way. I love vertical horizon. Okay I want to just let me grab something I ran out of his room and it was like entering another universe a universe where he didn't just say the things he had said and neither did I. A universe where he'd never been burned I'd never been raped we'd never lived in this fucked up house and neither of us even ever existed. I knocked on Kevin's door Can I come in. Yeah. Hold on a sec. Kevin turned down pretty hate machine. Kevin was busy doing what IMO 18 year olds do painting shit with black sparkly nail polish. Were you really gonna fuck angel. He asked once I had settled into a squatting position on his floor. I don't know. You know he's a sociopath right. I know. I think I was just horny. Well why don't we have sex. He asked flipping his emo hair out of his face only for it to fall back in place. I thought you were gay. I said I thought you had a strap on. He quipped back. I did. My ex destroyed it along with all my other sex toys and laundry. Oh well I feel pretty gay this week but maybe next week I'll be straight again okay.

[00:26:10] We painted some dolls heads he had all over with the black nail polish then a bowling ball then an old yearbook. Then we did lines of coke off the hardwood floor and talked about how much we hated living in that house and how the live in was probably gay and probably going to kill himself for it one day because that's what Christian closet cases do. And who'd want to live in a house with a bunch of fucked up teenagers and not have any friends or life anyways. Angel and my ex and everything that had happened that put me in this house seemed far away and trivial. Angel never did mention the night of almost getting down my pants but it wouldn't be the last time he tried. When I finally went back up to my room in the wee hours of the morning I looked for the vertical horizon.

[00:26:52] It was gone thanks Genesis. That's great.

[00:26:57] Our final reader tonight is Calvin Gimbel of which is that closer to how it's pronounced now. OK you say it for me. OK Calvin is an author and organizer based in the Pacific Northwest. His fiction appears in Electric Literature platitude glitter Wolf Cream City them and elsewhere. He's the recipient of awards from artist trust Jack Straw cultural center and for culture. In addition to residencies through Codex writer's block and the Kimo Harding Nelson center for the Arts a founding member of the Lions

Maine art collective. Calvin has organized shows at venues throughout Seattle and performed at Henry art gallery where he was also a featured speaker. Welcome Calvin.

[00:27:35] Hello my name is Calvin compelling pitch. Thank you very much to the library and for culture for letting us be here. Thank you very much to Suzanne and Genesis for coming out and reading so beautifully. And right now I'm also very thankful to my immune system for telling me I'll be sick tomorrow instead of right now. I have a book coming out this summer and I'm very excited about that. And if you want to be excited about it too. I brought a legal pad and a pen. And I will send you one email when it comes out. Only one. This is an excerpt not from the book coming out this summer but a novel blacked out.

[00:28:21] He took the bottle and smashed it into a tree.

[00:28:25] I want for glass like fireworks for the thing to shatter it's pieces dissolved into rain he hit. But the thing didn't break. Hit again and the tree one reverberation made him drop the bottle stumble and probably if he could feel it hurt his wrist elbow hand. Stupid dumb fucking bottle. It seemed like he was more sober within his vision went dark eyes and mind out of sync. He hit his own head smacking the side with his palm like to get picture back on the TV that worked. The Forest came back the moonlight but a different place than before though. How could anyone tell with everywhere. Tree is the same Moss bark dirt Berry devil's club Bramble fern in theory there were moon and stars overhead but he couldn't see them through the mist an endless drizzle still. A bright mist a full moon kind of mist that he could see in and if he wasn't so drunk he wouldn't be tripping on things. Hard to know how far he'd gone in the forest if when he blacked. He'd gone deeper or closer to town the skies cleared. If the skies cleared and if you were a boy scout he'd know how to figure it out. Everyone fucking wanted to be a boy scout with the uniforms and patches and shit. Every summer they set up a table at the high school right by the Army recruiters who came to school twice a week. Fucking camouflage wearing soldiers telling how exciting it was how much money they'd make. Sam knew he wasn't stupid. He knew there was a connection. Get the little ones into Cub Scouts to get them into Boy Scouts to get them to sign up for the war. Get bombed in a million pieces.

[00:30:22] Have fun using your G.I. bill then the fucking the fucking government wanted them to join up.

[00:30:33] His vision to. He felt sick it be easier to think if you weren't noxious and he was lost and the Boy Scouts. He hated them. He wouldn't have joined even if they let him. They said he had an attitude problem and his hair. They didn't like the way shaved the way he cut it just like church. Hypocrite. Bunch of conformists. He loved church when he was little. The musty pews with the sermons and the food and the adults the only place he could remember people being nice to him. But he was different. And what did Christ today about being different. Him and his mother and brother expelled anyways. He wouldn't be caught dead in church now. You like to draw a pentagram is over his notebook. Hail Satan yelled that sometimes in the street. Satan. God. None of it real but the look on people's faces like he had horns coming out of his head. Gullible hypocrite assholes Judge not lest you be judged. He hated this town full of jerk offs. He knew their secrets too and more than a couple

ways. There were videos on his brother's computer the spy cam and Sam had lock picks. He wasn't an idiot.

[00:32:01] Everyone thought he was stupid but he taught himself to pick locks ordered a pic set that folded up to look like a jack knife sometimes. If he really looked hard he saw people's thoughts like speech bubbles coming out of their heads. He saw it or heard them along with the voices that floated in the air. There were always voices. He ignored them except for sometimes when he was drunk or tired or in a weird space those times he woke with a light too heavy pressing on. Eyes and eyelids when it buzzed and everything seemed under water when that happened. Sometimes it is jaw twitched a little muscular spasm and the voice came out of his mouth. It had to be a strong voice like swimming in the river. There's always a current but sometimes you're tired and you hit a strong one and then you get carried away. That's what happened in church when he was small. He eat pray and listen to the music and the pastor and pray for health. His mother instructed your father's early release and that was its own weird headspace because he believed back then he really believed in the Lord's power to save.

[00:33:25] That's when the voices appeared. He'd fall down a kid twitching and speak in tongues at first the congregation loved it.

[00:33:35] Hallelujah. Glory be the pastor saying this boy has been claimed as a vessel. Asking if anyone felt the Lord in their hearts granting them the power of interpretation to clarify the boy's words. That didn't happen. Finally after enough times the pastor brought a recorder to service and taped Sam speaking in tongues. Sent an audio file to his superior who sent it to the biggest linguistics department on the West Coast results. It wasn't gibberish. It wasn't Latin he'd been speaking some native language. A local one extinct about 70 years. And the words the most profane and most curse worthy content.

[00:34:27] The pastor apologized but Sam little Sam had the devil in him. What did he remember. The exorcism. The failure scouring himself in the bath with the rough side of a sponge to get the demon out. Praying to be saved. Stupid him confusing God with the devil didn't matter how many times the pastor laid healing hands. He couldn't go to service without his mouth opening blasting alien tongues expelled to protect the congregation assholes he bent and puked on a log. It felt better. Sort of. He thought this part of the forest looked familiar sounds of big rigs on the highway. Must be getting towards town. He pulled a plant flask from his pocket shook it drank the remains blackness took over when he came back he was on the main strip two blocks of shops that the locals referred to when they said town post office gas station hardware drugstore the diner the bar all closed he watched his reflection through dark glass ugly around teen with dark hair pimples dark eyes fish belly skin and an overhang brow a big reddish birthmark started under his jaw and splashed across the left cheek. He wore jeans a shirt and a vest black and covered in patches that were band names and anarchy AIDS sewn in a big back patch showed a demon eyed knife wielding boy from a film the t shirt endorsed a different band and even drunk he was conscious self-conscious of the way his hips pushed and distorted the fabric it rained but he didn't feel cold the denim sat heavy waterlogged and the patches looked even dirty or wet than they normally did he walked on wanting to pass out right there wanting

to go to a show they had punk shows sometimes at the VFW hall an hour away shows played once a month in a wood room with no stage so people marched and knocked into the singer playing fast punk.

[00:37:02] Between the Eagles and the plaques and American flags but that's OK. This was the biggest punk scene in this part of Oregon. Still he wished he could go but they took his license away. There were so many rules even more than before rights and privileges waived. He had mandatory meetings with his parole officer mandatory drug tests counseling scholastic attendance. If a police officer wanted to search him he had to comply. He couldn't drink had to work 20 hours a week or do as much community service. That was American freedom they got him a job frying chicken six seven hours a day standing up dropping baskets and spluttering oil washing up putting food in greasy white bags and handing the bags out to drivers his manager watching telling him that he'd fucked up. But this was his chance. If he worked hard Sam could have his own franchise telling him not to wear ripped pants to put on the hairnet. The manager not working himself but drinking a soda. Watching Sam telling him to speed up do this do that. Don't take a break. It's not your break time. Someone from school came and now they all knew all showed up carloads of them from the high school. They laughed took pictures of him holding the bags wearing the hairnet told him to smile made huge orders and changed their minds at the end. The manager drinking his coke telling him to go ahead and redo the order saying this now this is an honest dollar you had to get out Grant.

[00:38:45] His brother had left escape to L.A. or not L.A.. Pitt stopped in San Francisco. Grant sent him a letter in juvie with the address. Sam wrote back but Grant didn't answer. Sam planned to run away meet his brother and go with him to L.A. a new life where the son kept everyone dry tired drunk. What he needed a break. Sat on the pavement and closed his eyes for only a second opened them pulled himself up and leaned on the bar in the window. He saw himself but the reflection was wrong. He looked like a girl same birthmark same clothes but female two breasts jutted out front heavy and round in his shirt. He touched his chest his real chest and found the vision confirmed breasts squished under his hand. He dropped it shocked like he'd been zapped by a fence looked at the image again saw the breasts saw the girl thought he was going and saying his hands went back to the tits and then a horrible thought he touched his deck or where his dick oughta be and found it absent. That was too much. The ground barked and he grabbed at the window for balance his vision rocked and righted itself. When it calmed he had a normal reflection. Hands on chest on groin everything in order. He must have blacked had a weird dream that happens sometimes out of the corner of his eye. He saw people that weren't there compared to that. This wasn't so nuts. Just a weird little dream. He coughed and pissed on the side of the bar. Good pressure released. He wandered home

[00:40:41] Went to school the next day went to work went to school went to work and woke in the middle of the night once thinking he'd had the same dream. Then it happened sober midday and that time it didn't go away. He locked himself in his room for two days taking his clothes off then putting them on the biggest clothing he had to make the curves and shapes go away. Breasts hips no deck thighs. A shorter version of him. Impossible. He was losing his mind. Two days missing school and work and parole. His officer called left a voicemail threatening to drag Sam back to jail for violating the

terms of their legal agreement. Sam didn't dare answer the phone when he spoke. The words were high pitched. No one could see him that way. He stole a bottle of rum and drank it all hoping to convince himself that he was just drunk that when he sobered it would go away. That didn't work. Breasts dangled as he heaved on all fours bent over the toilet when he heard the sounds of his father at home. Sam hid under the covers when it ended. His body shuttered all around the way his mouth did with the voices he was looking down at his hands and he actually saw them wide and watched hair sprout over the wrists. The parole officer called again. He couldn't stay. He packed a bag. Pulled a cardboard box from the trash and marker to sign for San Francisco. From there the highway holding a sign thumb popped at a right angle time to get out of this place. Crazy or not. He'd been there too long. You needed to find his brother.

[00:42:28] Thank you. Thanks so much Calvin. So now we have time for some questions from the audience. I'm gonna give these folks some mikes and if you have questions I would love to hear them. We just ask that you direct them toward the writer that you're interested in hearing from. People are feeling shy. I have one to start. Calvin since you had reached out to the library to pull this event together I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the project that inspired the reading tonight and why you wanted to work with Susan and Genesis so the extra they just read was the very first chapter of a novel I've been working on for a few years and last spring.

[00:43:12] I applied to for culture for a grant to help me finish the project and one of the things I realized when I was working on the grant application was that there was a lot of interest in Seattle to hear from trans people and this microphone works a lot better.

[00:43:35] So there was a lot of interest that I was hearing from foreign culture and that I was hearing when I looked around to hear more from trans and gender queer people in their own words because I got talked about a lot and there is another group I belong to because I'm a first generation citizen that there was also a lot of curiosity I found about people who'd immigrated to this country or whose parents had immigrated to this country. So there's some navigation between the different cultures that happens. And I thought it would be pretty interesting to find readers who satisfied both those criteria. I think you have to look at the world in a slightly different way. When you're moving between cultures when you're moving between perceived genders and Suzanne and Genesis fit the bill so nicely I started writing in 2009.

[00:44:34] I had to write a letter to my son. I was living in Maryland. He was just finishing up at Evergreen Evergreen State and I had to write him a letter explaining what I was about to undertake which was changing my agenda and then we had to write a letter to. We were living in a tiny little town on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Cindy my wife and I decided that the best way to explain this to people was with a letter. And we ended up probably reading that with people over a thousand people but I realized that there was a lot of my story that people didn't know and didn't understand it was a big like a lot of us when we come out. It's a big shock to a lot of people when we say hey you know it's not quite who you think I am. It kind of took off from there. And it's a work in progress. I don't know what it's gonna get finished but I'm plugging away at it and I find a lot of times he has many writers know I look back at what I wrote five years ago and I'm like I gotta rewrite that so sure.

[00:45:38] Okay so the question was the practice of writing in our everyday lives and what that means to us. What that looks like it does. Okay well I'll answer first. So I write. I try and write every day and most days I do write for one to five hours a day. And it's it's for me at least it's very emotionally taxing. So you know I can't handle too many social interactions in a day. But at the same time it's very rewarding and it's very it's just something that I feel like I have to do.

[00:46:15] It's kind of like like food like if I didn't do it I would starve.

[00:46:21] So that that's for me. Yeah. I wish I was a little more disciplined but I try and write. I have a writers group that I meet with every Thursday.

[00:46:31] And usually it's bringing you know 600 to 700 words of a completed piece so that's kind of my goal every week is OK let me just continue the thing I've got to look out for though in writing these shorter pieces is incorporating it into chapters lot of times you know I end up rushing a part of a story when I could be extended as I go back now I'm trying to connect a lot of these short stories into a long narrative. I'll start I guess yeah I've written some fiction. I just find I'm still trying to work out what's going on with my life and I find putting it down on paper download it from my head and makes it a lot clearer as to what my life has been. So you know I didn't write quickly. I started therapy for gender dysphoria when I was 26 and I finally came out as Susan at 55. So there's a lot of stuff that I still need to work out. And I find writing about it is the best way for me to process it.

[00:47:38] Actually I write a lot of fiction as well as nonfiction and I would say the difference is fiction is like candy. That's what I write to relax and for fun and nonfiction is more like therapy therapy that is really hard to do and really really sex. It's better for you in the long run.

[00:48:03] I'm using this microphone. I wrote the first nonfiction piece I'd ever written the end of this summer and I found the process much more stressful because I was writing it for as the payment for the residency I did in Las Vegas this summer. I had to write a piece about Las Vegas and I felt so much desire for everything I said to be an incontestable fact to be like fair. And so like encompass a whole city and to encompass a city you have to encompass a country and the world and the time period and all of history. It seemed like which gives you a clue as to how my research went where I spent several weeks on Wikipedia after the residency stressing out about manifest destiny and how that related to Las Vegas which is not an exaggeration where I go I finally got it together and wrote a piece and it's on electric literature. But that desire to like have a source for every single sentence or maybe multiple sources for every single sentence. And to be fair was very distracting. So at least with fiction that's my world. And who can tell me it's wrong. Does prose for me.

[00:49:30] So I don't actually technically know what prose is. It's not poetry OK. I write poetry as well but mostly prose. Yeah. Well she is very self serving so I don't usually share it. Rose prose only prose only ever prose poetry I think is more emotionally intelligent than I want to be

[00:49:59] So the the main theme of my memoir is trauma because I've experienced a lot of trauma in my life and I think that it's I think that's interesting and that's what's important for me to write and the interesting thing about trauma is that it. It does something to your brain where you can't remember things linearly. So my memoir isn't linear it's going it's a lot of pieces that stand alone. I'm trying to write it so they stand alone. They also do you connect by night in like a beginning to end sort of way I suppose if you were like a huge fan of mine and you were a nerd you could try and piece it together yourself

[00:50:49] But I won't.

[00:50:50] Yes thank you all of you for coming out tonight for the library especially thank you ever so much. Really Touched

[00:50:59] 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.