



Library podcast

Laurie Frankel discusses 'This Is How It Always Is'

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[00:00:36] Hi everybody I'm Stesha Brandon. I'm the literature and humanities program manager here at The Seattle Public Library and welcome to this evening's program with Laurie Frankel. Thank you to our authors series sponsor Gary Kunis and to the Seattle Times for generous promotional support of library programs. Thank you as well to our program partner Elliott Bay Book Company for being here tonight and finally we are grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors helped the library provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community. So the library foundation donors here with us tonight we say thank you very much for your support. Now without further ado please help me welcome Karen Mayita amen from Elliott Bay Book Company who will introduce Ms.

[00:01:31] Good evening. So about a year ago when Lori Frankel's book. This is how it always is came out in hardcover. We hosted a very well attended event at Elliott Bay to celebrate. It's a Seattle book and she's one of the Seattle seven writers and they're very well represented in this room. So thank you very much for coming Seattle seven writers and she's one of our own very beloved writers. This book which is about a Seattle family in which the youngest of five boys announces at age 5 that when he grows up he wants to be a girl. It's a loving and warm family and it's not that there are no issues. And one of the biggest issues is keeping things secret. And that's something that will feel very familiar to many of us.

[00:02:19] And so the book came out in the world and though she's known for some writing some pretty brilliant op eds on raising her own transgender child who's an only child by the way. Laurie Frankel has written in this novel a work of fiction that's an exploration of issues faced by our families by mothers by daughters by sons by brothers and sisters. And I'm writing it in this way. I think she invites us all to encounter in a fictional way. Some of these family issues feelings enjoy in a way that goes beyond the truth of one story. And her book has received many accolades and she made many many best of 2018 lists including The Strangers bustles Globe and Mail Seattle Review of Books Pop Sugar book BB King County Library a short list for the Pacific Northwest Book Award. So it was all over the place and we thought this was a perfect opportunity to invite people who haven't maybe haven't heard Laurie speak about the book and also people who are book groups I know at

least one of you has a book group is reading this in the coming month. And also for people for whom the issues which Lori Lori writes about whose families for whom these issues are critical and also families that may be in people that maybe haven't made up their mind about families like ours. This is your opportunity to hear Laurie speak a bit about her book about herself that her own experiences including a large tour. And so I'm really interested to hear what she has experienced in bringing this book out into communities beyond Seattle.

[00:04:15] So this book is really for all of us.

[00:04:20] So today she's going to give a little talk based on some of the things I brought up. Hopefully some of you have questions I know many of you have read this book.

[00:04:30] So that's a particular treat I think for authors to get questions from people who have read the book. And afterwards she'll be signing books and we have copies of not only this book but also goodbye for now an atlas of love.

[00:04:46] I also we also asked Laurie if she would give us a few resources and books that she recommended for people that want to read more. And those appear up on the screen. We have some error at the Elliott Bay tape table and we have many many more books both at Elliott Bay Book Company and also at Seattle Public Library. This is a community that has really embraced different kinds of families including trans people and trans families and I can certainly my family includes all different kinds of people including trans people and also my friendship network. I think it's probably true for many of you as well. So with that thank you for coming.

[00:05:29] And please help me in welcoming Lori Franci things I like how I'm locked in here.

[00:05:48] I have this wall actually slit here so I can escape.

[00:05:53] So it is lovely to be here. You know it is nerve wracking to talk to people. Thank you all so much for being here is really one of these things where you wake up in the morning on a Tuesday in Seattle and look at the weather and think no one is going to leave the house to come to a book event tonight because if I didn't have to never leave the house to go to a book event tonight because the weather is really gross and sometimes it's true in Seattle. So

[00:06:16] I appreciate your being here. I appreciate you being here even if the weather were fantastic I appreciate you being here.

[00:06:24] It is really nice to see you.

[00:06:27] Facebook helpfully reminded me this morning that it's been exactly a year since this book came out hardcover which I guess makes it super apt that it is now coming out in paperback and it's one of these things where you feel like oh I've just done now like I've been on book tour for a year and now I'm finished. And it's over. And Facebook and my publisher are both like no no no.

[00:06:47] We're going to go again. So cute to be wholesome. And it is awesome. It's really good to talk about.

[00:06:53] And it's I mean it's been quite a year y'all.

[00:06:56] I don't know if you have noticed but there's been a lot of talk in the last week or so about about this year and about what it is. It is the year anniversary. It's funny that the whole country isn't focused on its being the year anniversary of my book launch squared.

[00:07:13] So I've always had I would talk all about that and I had this plan to talk about that. And then I went into the shower and then I got out of the shower and Ursula had died.

[00:07:25] Which is almost certainly not because I took a shower but which is quite terrible because I kind of feel like what the world needs now is Ursula when and and that made me think oh you know there are all these other things I wanted to talk about instead.

[00:07:42] And then I thought how they might not want to lecture honors. You know I used to be a college literature teacher. So that's my inclination and that's probably off topic but I did manage to whittle down the 15 quotes that leapt to mind immediately to a few that could bookend what we do this evening and and then we can talk as I say I've been doing this for a year now. And so one of the things I know is that people have questions and I want to hear them.

[00:08:07] I think it's a really wonderful thing. I think that the questions are good. I think asking the questions are great I think speaking to it is exactly what we ought to be doing together. So when I have time to do that too. So I want to talk forever but man I have stuff to say anyway. Ursula Gwyn's so this the quote I thought we might start off with this is from the language of the night which is amazing if you have not if you have not read it or if you have not read it recently I read it maybe a couple of years ago and it's just a really different read with. I don't know with a few years on me. This is what it is. Children know perfectly well that unicorns aren't real. They also are the books about unicorns. If are good books are true books. I thought that that was a good place to start this evening because I wanted to tell you about because I wanted to tell you about how my year has been because exactly a year ago tonight I. I stood in the basement of Elliott Bay and launched this thing and then and then I went everywhere else and now I'm home and never mind the weather which is gross. It is the best place to be. And yet there are some interesting things to tell you about what's going on out there. And I've been and I've been to talk about this book about a transgender kid how a transgender kid so that so that's so that's worth thinking about. This book is not real. Unicorns are not real. This is not remotely a real story but it is a true story in a different way. And and and that's a funny place that's a funny place to live.

[00:09:58] I think so in order to tell you the story of my year on book tour have to actually back up about six months which is because in September so this book came out in January came out three days after the inauguration in September before that.

[00:10:17] So like six weeks before the election I wrote I wrote and I wrote an article for The New York Times for a variety of reasons many of them were because my publisher thought that answering this question What of it is real and what if it is true. Was the thing to get out ahead of it was a question to answer. Like before the book came out I thought well cast it seems like a great idea. And it is also true that you know books are really great man. They've changed my life. But not everyone reads them and lots of people read The New York Times and want to talk to a lot of people. It's a good way to do it. This book is long hundred twelve thousand words give or take. I had fifteen hundred worth of what I wanted to tell and was willing to tell and was willing to put in print about my story. I wasn't willing to tell my kids story because it's not mine and because I don't know what it is and I want to post it on her. But I had this little piece that that was that was what Ursula Gwen is calling real. And so it seemed like OK let's let's put that out there and see what happens. And the New York Times runs that it's a Modern Love column The New York Times runs it on Sunday. It posed to the Internet on Friday which I found out when I woke up on Friday morning and had inbox full of hate mail and quite a few threats against my life and that of my child had a lot of people this latent Shawi a lot of people who wanted to question the masculinity of my husband a lot of people who wanted to to to post these questions about. What what kind of a man would be married to a you'll have to fill in the blank because there are children present.

[00:12:05] But you can imagine the word that they used to refer to me and a lot of speculation on that front and a lot because a lot of what's happening it was happening in my inbox some of it was happening on Twitter and on Facebook. So there were these threads just like long long threads worth of speculation on this friend and I was surprised do nothing other than dumb luck.

[00:12:27] I was with my publisher at the time I was with my editor who's also my publisher and the head of publicity for my publisher at a book event. And so we just kind of sat and watched this stuff come in. And that was great because then we all you know we thought ok like this is this is what's coming this is what it's going to be like. And and that was that was a good and useful thing to know.

[00:12:52] It was also frankly a good and useful thing to blow off because it was pretty immediately clear that it was just mean. It was really mean and that people who want to e-mail you and say this really mean terrible things and and her and are hoping for your death and have some ideas about how you might want to exact that yourself. And you know and you're a small child that these aren't well punctuated e-mails that these are not e-mails that are that are well put. And then if you can look at them like that if you can critique the grammar then then it's less upsetting.

[00:13:31] So so we're watching this stuff come in and you know I'm kind of blowing it off and thinking oh this is fringe. There's like a handful of people. How many people can there possibly be. And then six weeks later we have this election that went in exactly the direction that absolutely no one seemed to think it was going to go. And that's when we thought oh well get on the blog with a word I would say. And you know what do we do about that. And so then you know a chit chatting with the people who make these decisions and the people who are on my side about do we push it. Do we not bring this book out in January do we pushed a month to we push it six months do we do we wait a year. Do

I. Do we change the tour or do I need security. You know like what happens next. And everyone's like answer was the same everyone's answer was now more than ever. Now more than ever.

[00:14:27] This is what the world needs and I was kind of like OK I guess. And at the same time as we were feeling kind of worried the economics of book tour are ones that would never work out mathematically.

[00:14:44] Math is not my strong set high child in fact brought home math today that I could not puzzle because long division has changed completely from when I did it. And I'm saying look I know the answer but I don't have any idea how to tell you how to get there from the way you are doing it and that's how I feel about book tour book bookstore makes sense somehow. But it isn't it isn't numbers. So on the one hand they had me going to exactly the places you would guess when I started here and I went to Bellingham and I went to Portland and I went to San Francisco and Berkeley and you know okay that makes sense.

[00:15:17] They also wanted me to go to Georgia and Texas and North Carolina and South Carolina. And that's because that's where there were bookstores who wanted me to come. And that's because they were in communities who were having this conversation in some ways. This conversation is much more important to have in communities that are having conversation. You know what I mean we don't need it as much. One of the very first questions and I'll save you from asking the question at the end the first question that people ask me is why didn't you write a memoir. And the answer is it would have been a really boring memoir and really short because.

[00:15:52] And. And Seattle Public Schools has been fantastic and we know every school has been was incredible from day one. We met them yet because because we were new to school when when all of this went down in my life it would have been a really boring story. It's much more interesting to have this conversation in states where people are voting on that and in states where these questions are before their legislature. And that's where they were but then we were also really terrified about what would happen.

[00:16:26] So mostly what I have for you is good news.

[00:16:29] One of the things that is true is this. People who read books. People who come to bookstores. People who come to library events are reasonable loving generous thinking humans who know how to use a comma in an email. Part of it is that what people are willing to say to me online obviously is different than what they're willing to say to you in person. But part of it is I don't think those people were showing up and holding their tongues and throwing it out there but they didn't seem the tongue holding types for the most part. I don't think they were coming to these events and just not saying anything because they were embarrassed to make death threats to my face. So it would have been embarrassing for both of us. I think that those people have written books and and Arcelia up to events like this. And for me I feel like that's a mixed bag because because I want everyone to read this back and because I think I want to change your mind I have in fact gotten a great many e-mails from people who have said I did not want to read this book. My book club picked

this book. I was against this and I read this book and now I feel differently now I have learned you have changed my mind. And I think deal like that is the that is the reason you know there's a reason why we do this. That is really wonderful and fantastic thing. But of course like these are people who are who are already who are already willing to read a little bit.

[00:18:00] In fact the the biggest the most dramatic thing that happened to me on book tour is that I was in Berkeley the night Milo Yiannopoulos was in Berkeley. And so the campus was sheltered in place. So all of these classes who were planning on coming did not come off campus and the whole city was was it was in lockdown and there were riots in the street. And you know the whole thing. And I mean I'm I'm so clueless. And you know the other thing I suppose that is important to say about book tour is you know you get in this in this mode. So first of all. I wear this outfit. Every day. The. Tonight. And

[00:18:37] Worst thing ever. Did you have

[00:18:43] I do anything else. So

[00:18:46] You know that whole book tour is like you wake up you fly you get there you get a taxi you go to the hotel you put on your book tour outfit to deliver to the bookstore. You know you read you get out. You're like man I should probably eat something because boy I have done it since yesterday. What is open at night 30 at night and then sometimes they eat at the gas station. It's very it's I mean listen it's like it's make a star. It's glamorous and you get at the gas station you know you go back to your hotel and you do later so there's not a lot of time. Don't have news. I did not realize that Milo Yiannopoulos was going to be at Berkeley at the same time I was. That was not something that I was aware of until I got up off of underground whatever they called the Bart.

[00:19:28] I guess you know when I came up and there are police everywhere and everyone is in riot gear and you know it was terrifying but also like I was on book tour I had some place to be. So you know I to up the street and you know there are all of these guys that are lined with their guns and their shields and I just like and there's a dude on a horse like he's the only one who's not in riot gear.

[00:19:49] The police officer on horse and I was like hi I'm Lori Franco. I wrote a book. I have an event at that bookstore down there. Think you have to let me through. That was the closest I came.

[00:20:00] That was the most dramatic thing that happened to me on book tour. There were not a lot of people there that night.

[00:20:07] But other than that like that was the that was the closest tragedy in South Carolina.

[00:20:12] I spoke to a. So during the day I went to talk to school which is not unusual. This particular school however was very unusual.

[00:20:22] This is a public residential or high school yes it's one of three in the country apparently amazing.

[00:20:31] It will not stun you to learn that their student body is pretty queer. So that's fantastic. That's why they wanted me to come. They wanted me to talk to them. I'm so to do it. They you know they had all these questions they sent me in advance it was going to be great. And you know I went in all prepared to talk about that topic.

[00:20:46] But it's an arts high school. They wanted to know how do you make yourself sit down and write every day. How do you organize chapters. How do you like balance you know making money and eating an art.

[00:20:59] And I was like yeah of course of course you're living this other thing that no questions about this other thing. They want to know about you how to be and and how to live that life which was even better to talk about.

[00:21:14] So I left there feeling all you know pleased with myself and went to the bookstore was through the evening event and you know and went through my whole Ishbel and read a little bit and talked a little bit and did a thing and the first hand that went up and you think by this point in the war I would have learned not to call on the first hand to the pops up and it's like some kind of a Apollonian thing like hand goes up you call on that person and that person said Are you Jewish. And I received a not insignificant amount of e-mail with the subject heading. I bet you were a Jew or variations on that theme. Now the distinction between Jew and Jewish cannot actually be overstated. And a lot of those e-mails were inviting me to find Jesus in again more and less polite ways and so I do not know what to do about that. But you know went in doubt told the truth so I said yeah I am Jewish and she said I'll talk to you after her.

[00:22:17] Oh and you know if I don't know. Let's move on. Let's see if they have questions about anything else.

[00:22:23] And she came up in the signing line and said it is because you're Jewish is that why you have an orange on the cover of the book. This is the hard cover for those of you on CNN is that why you have an art on the cover of the book. And I say first of all I have no idea what you're talking about say but had nothing to do with the cover of this book which is beautiful but has nothing to do with me including including the title and frankly that the name which my parents gave me my mother had this name picked out before she had my father picked out.

[00:22:53] So I can't take credit for any of that. I guess probably not the last name which is anyway.

[00:22:59] And then she proceeded to tell me this really amazing story which also turned out to be not real but true about how feminist Jews put an orange on their Seder plants a thing which I had never heard before and which was a really wonderful story that I wish were real but that I settle for true and that I will certainly do myself going forward. And it was just this really great moment of my being like

I'm in South Carolina. I'm geared up for this whole fight that we're going to have and we don't have a fight at all. I was in Texas when I had a person similarly firsthand up called on them and they said Are you a Jew. And I said I am. And and again there was kind of no follow up to that and she came to the signing line and said. And and held my hands and said she hoped for my child what happened to the children in the Holocaust.

[00:24:03] And I initially thought again some words I will say in front of small children. And that's a really really terrible thing.

[00:24:12] But she seems like such a nice old lady and her phrasing was so weird that though my mantra for this book has been don't poke the crazy. In this case I said Whatever do you mean kindly old woman.

[00:24:30] And she said Well you know the kids in concentration camps.

[00:24:34] It was really terrible for them. And and they had this really hard time in childhood. But then they got out and they were fine. And I know that things will be really hard for your kid when she's little but then you know she'll grow up and everything will be fine.

[00:24:49] And you know as is frequently the case was not sure what to say.

[00:24:58] And I wanted to quibble with how fine the kids who survived concentration camps probably were but that was not the point.

[00:25:07] The sentiment was in fact really warm one and and end the loving one.

[00:25:14] And I thought you know OK I can I can work with it.

[00:25:21] And it's and it's and it's important because when so many people's gut reaction is anger and fear and when politically on this front and then the number of friends what we're encouraging is anger and fear that response that is something else that is thought through. That is a metaphor I think OK that's half the that's half the battle already. I also had a woman on a book tour who you know I was talking about how how I didn't really want to. How I wanted to make sure not to push my kid one way or the other and you know what. Leave it open and you know how in general when you're parenting kids bring you things and you're not quite sure what what to do with them and you know they have to rethink and kind of proceed from there.

[00:26:12] And she came up to me afterwards and said My daughter is getting married and I really always thought she was like a small wedding person. And I really like her friend who I thought would be her maid of honor.

[00:26:22] But for some reason she wants like six bridesmaids and she wants this like giant wedding and I'm paying for it. And I don't think I should have to. Is that what having a Turness does you try

this. And you know at first I thought yes yes exact that's exact boy like there's not enough sarcasm to tell you how much that is having a transgender child was like but the more generous nature came came through it sometimes takes it a little while especially when I when I have traveling and spend too much time with TSA and. And and and I thought well OK. Indeed that's exactly what it is.

[00:27:01] That is why it has the title that it does though as I say did not choose the title I did choose the. I wrote the line in the book and it was the idea that I went into the book with that this functions as a metaphor that what your particular kid brings you might be anything at all probably isn't this.

[00:27:22] It's definitely going to be something and it's going to be something you didn't expect and it's going to be something you didn't see coming and it's going to be something that you don't initially know what to do about. And that's just too bad because you have to figure out what to do about it anyhow. And you might get it wrong and then I guess call the caterer and dial it up but I know it's a funny thing because it seems it seems like an apt metaphor to me.

[00:27:49] But it was indeed exactly the idea that I went in with that. Maybe you envision your kid to be a small wedding kind of a person and your kid turns out to be a big wedding kind of person and then you know you kind of go from there. So that's that's what happens. And it's a really it's a really great thing. The other thing that I learned wah wah as an actor is that people have lots of questions and I feel like those questions come from really interesting interesting places. Usually when one is on book tour questions are about the book and some of them were but. And you all should feel free to ask questions about the book especially because some time it you know like in the first round it's only just come out and nobody is ready yet. But some of you have read it.

[00:28:40] And that's what one is sort of prepared to do.

[00:28:43] Like you've been writing this book for a really long time so you're ready to answer questions about these characters who have lived in your brain and instead people want to ask these questions about you know my life and I and my kid the latter of which I find myself unwilling to answer in a straightforward way though. Listen I've gotten really good at faking it. You just wait

[00:29:08] And you know that which was sort of the other challenge going into this is how to how to talk about this book whilst also protecting her privacy and anonymity and that has indeed been a lot more possible than I imagined people instead want to ask these questions that are like How did you know and are you sure. And I think those are really wonderful questions. It took me a little while to understand where they were coming from.

[00:29:39] I think that the place where they come from is people noticing exactly this thing again not necessarily about their kids wedding but my kid is doesn't fit in in this way. My kid is really weird in this way. My kid is not behaving in the way that I predicted or expected going in. And yet I haven't made a decision about that child's identity. How did you. And that is a fantastic question and it's a difficult one and it's a thing that took me well like 120000 words figure out to defy and to find the answer to.

[00:30:17] And so that is the other things that I feel like you know I've kind of stumbled upon along the way is that people's questions are bigger than they are. As I said the way in which this issue is being tackled not here but not here to be perfectly honest about less here than in other parts of the country is one of great fear is coupling trans gender people kids and adults with violence and with predatory behavior. And this idea that you are in danger and that you have something to fear and that is a really difficult thing to get your head around when you have a fourth grader who wouldn't hurt anybody. It's a difficult thing to get your head around when you are the one who has an inbox full of. Death threats. And yet it isn't easy might not be the right word. It is an important and possible thing to talk people down from. Because in fact it doesn't make any sense. And what I found is that at least among the people who come to book events it is one that people are really willing to hear and to have.

[00:31:44] So so so so on that note I want to say I want to save time to answer questions but I also wanted to promised to book and to book and this one with more soliloquy in it.

[00:31:59] And so I want to do that and I also want to say that there is good news out there.

[00:32:05] It's in bookstores and it's in libraries. The readers of the world the writers of the world the people who have books in their lives are going to unite and take over then the world will be better. So great news that is happening here but it is happening everywhere.

[00:32:21] I offer you this quote The dead are dead the Great and Mighty go their way unchecked the only hope in the world lies in the people of no account.

[00:32:31] So I think I shall be a person of no account. There are a lot of us out there and it turns out we read and that is the good news I have to offer you from the rest of the world.

[00:32:50] I can read you one more just because it's on topic.

[00:32:57] Just one more on topic. You know first of all the woman also did a lot of really wonderful craft essays on writing. So this is also applicable and this is what she has to say about that she's giving this here's an example of a deliberate violation of a fake roll call and the generic pronoun in English is he she Shafir she's this violation. Each one in turn reads their piece aloud.

[00:33:21] This is wrong. Say the grammar bullies because each one each person is a singular noun and there is a plural pronoun. But Shakespeare used Zehr with words such as everybody anybody a person and so do we all of them were talking. It's enough to drive anyone out of their senses said George Bernard Shaw the grammarians started telling us sibs incorrect along the 16th and 17th century. That was when they also declared that the pronoun he includes both sexes. As in if a person needs an abortion he should be required to tell his parents. My use of there is socially motivated. And if you like politically correct a deliberate response to the socially and politically significant banning of

our genderless pronoun by language legislators enforcing the notion that the male sex is the only one that counts. I consistently break this rule I consider to be not only false but pernicious.

[00:34:17] I know what I'm doing and why. I know manners a little brown.

[00:34:22] It's OK. That's great. OK. Also

[00:34:28] You know I could do this all night long but as I say I would I have learned just that if I save time for questions people ask and that's great and should be done.

[00:34:37] And please remember to repeat the question I'm going to remember to repeat the question. Oh look there you are. I know it's the first one. I love it. Tell me. I am Jewish. If that was are you going to ask I know I know and you know what I never learn. And I taught English for good Juliann years. So you think I would've learned

[00:35:00] Yes. Yes. OK. So the question was What about privacy and what about my kid and privacy and privacy is usually these days which is a great question and it was mine as well. That was the question I shared. In fact it was the only one. So sometimes when you sell a book you talk to lots of editors who are interested in it and lots of publishers and you have lots of questions for them and you know sometimes you have a dozen questions and you want everybody's perspective and ideas and then you make a decision afterwards. In this case I had one question and I asked it of only one person because I said to my agent before we go out with this book I want you to sit down and think about

[00:35:38] Who is the person who is going to be able to say to the rest of the organization we got to protect. We've got to protect this woman's kid.

[00:35:49] Was the only question I had and going it it wasn't clear to me that there was an answer.

[00:35:57] Do you not think that it was possible. I did not see how it could be done and so we talked about using a pseudonym and my editor very kindly said to me you could but it won't work because not my first book. And I you know I bet like Karen would notice the change right. And in fact I was not so much worried about now because my kid underwent this transition over the course of a year in front of her entire school. Everyone we know now is I am worried about 10 years from now when I don't know who she will be or what she will want people to now.

[00:36:41] It was also not clear to me at the beginning of this book that that was necessarily the direction she was going to go or that that was necessarily the direction the book was going to go which kind of sounds absurd in retrospect but is the way of both children and books.

[00:36:54] They don't go in the direction that you had planned so it didn't it didn't seem to me a crushing problem until the at which point I said no I changed my mind. I won't do it you can't make me. And they said Well actually here's your signature on this piece of paper we can make you. But of

course you know they. And what turned out to be the case is that if we kept her photo and her name out of it that a Google search of me does not lead back to her and vice versa. It took a lot of taking things down off of social media and being very careful about what I put up on social media. But you know in the immediate aftermath of. The inauguration a great many protections were immediately rolled back and People magazine had just reviewed the book. And so you know they knew me and the editor there called my publicist and said oh this is going to be great. We want to interview her when interview a kid. We want to send a photographer to your house and this is the kind of publicity when a book has just come out that publicists like fall over weeping with gratitude for. And they said no to that. And I think that that would not have been true of a lot of publicists and a lot of publishers. They have been amazing and not only did they say no to that but they didn't. They didn't pressure me. And you know kill me into that and say well it's up to you. But if this book just so you know which is a lot of things that they say and the end. And these folks have been amazing and haven't done any of that. So that is what that is. That is how that is how that particular problem has been solved.

[00:38:40] It wasn't clear to me at the beginning that that was going to be sufficient. But so far so far that is has been what it is as I say to I've become pretty adept at answering questions without necessarily answering questions. And people are embarrassed to say to your face. You know really private inappropriate things about you and your child.

[00:39:05] So they asked me all mine. I get a lot of e-mail that ask them you my glowingly inappropriate.

[00:39:12] You know what I should tell you all.

[00:39:13] I get lots of really loving wonderful e-mail lots of people who e-mail me to say oh my god is just so amazing. It was so great. I love it. I love you. I thought I was the only one. Thank you so much for writing this book. It wasn't like this when I was growing up I'm so glad it is now.

[00:39:26] I get tons of really loving e-mail.

[00:39:29] It's just less interesting than for this kind of talk. You say the other guys.

[00:39:35] And so again I get that online. But I don't get it in person and online. It's really beautiful as you just delete them then they go away forever.

[00:39:45] She got tell me.

[00:39:50] Oh yes. Such a good question. That was a question did I go to Thailand. I did go to Thailand. I did go to Thailand because so it wasn't clear to me. Speaking of things that happened in books I didn't know at the beginning that it was going to happen.

[00:40:01] I felt they were going to drive cross country. There would be a really nice cross-country drive and I thought that I've been. I have myself. I drove out here from Maryland 15 years ago. I remember stuff. I could go back to Idaho and write some things down if I needed to. Like I was going to be easy. But that is not what happened which was not clear to me until I typed it I wrote she agreed to go to Thailand and I said a word from children. And then I spent 24 hours thinking I could make it up and I could google it and look at some travel sites and be fine. And that seemed totally sufficient to me. And and I learned that I couldn't. By trying to do it I couldn't even make it up wrong. You know I thought I'd put it down and fix it later which is my approach to drafting in general. Right. Such horrible rough drafts that I had that I that I worry that if somebody breaks into my house in the night and steals my computer they'll think I'm a total hack and look

[00:41:06] At a person who stole my computer.

[00:41:08] Don't make judgments about what a terrible writer I am because I really better after us and I thought oh I'll just make some things up about Thailand and then fix them later.

[00:41:16] I couldn't even make it up so the next day I called a travel agents and have to go to Thailand and I have to do it right now because I can't finish this book without. I do it and she said where do you want to go. And I said

[00:41:31] Because I didn't want to do anything about.

[00:41:33] I had no idea. I didn't know what I was going to need them to do. So I went for two weeks I left. I left in two weeks and I went for two. I called my mother and said Heidi you were going to Thailand.

[00:41:44] And she's like she's totally not thinking I'm serious but it was serious. So I brought my mom with me. We went for two weeks we saw a little bit of everything including many many things that didn't make the book because as I say I didn't know what I was going to need them to do and I thought they might want to lie on the beach for a couple of days. That could totally happen in a novel so I should definitely go to a beach resort. And have free drinks because I bet they would. Ten year old's love for a few alcoholic drinks. These are the kind of things you have to justify yourself. And I feel like I wasn't there and I I I'm ready to go back. It was a really amazing trip but it was very much like a business trip. I feel like I went as my characters but not as myself. I was looking through the eyes of these people that at that point I knew pretty well and feeling what they felt and seeing what they would see but not what I would see.

[00:42:37] And I feel like I have to go back which I did. It was awesome. Tell me yes.

[00:42:44] Ok. Excellent question as why. Why Thailand. And as I say it was a surprise to me. And I had the same questions which was you know this takes the book in a different direction. It's going to involve introducing all of these new characters who you know it's pretty late in the book to insert introducing new characters I guess is how I want to say that and it did not present a number of

problems not least of them. I had to fly halfway around the world and nighttime and there were lots of reasons not to do it and I couldn't figure out a way around it. And in fact I am working on a TV show version at the moment. And for a while thinking about it as a film and needing to caught a lot of things and I thought I'll just cut the Thailand part. I still couldn't cut it. I couldn't figure out how to end this book was out there going to Thailand. So this thing Thailand brought me two things. One of them is that there is indeed this recognized accepted part of the culture. Third gender as I say though I could have had that in Idaho would have been different but I could have had it. There were lots of ways to have that by having them go cross country. There were lots of ways to talk about that without necessarily being in Thailand.

[00:44:01] The other thing the Thailand for me is that in Thailand they are Buddhists and and when I turned out I needed to end this book was this idea this very Buddhist idea of the middle way.

[00:44:14] I really really really did not want to answer the question at the end of this back. I feel like I didn't want to tell you whether this child went forth and beat a boy or girl. I wanted to not get through that question to the extent that that was possible. It is really difficult because English is not as personal when tells us English does not have a gender neutral pronoun third or third person pronoun. So for a while I thought I'd write the book in first person but then no one could talk to the child for a while I thought about writing the book in second person. But I enjoyed myself after about an hour and a half of that so it didn't seem like it was going to be a good solution in the long term. But you know you is gender neutral and is gender neutral he Hsin not gender neutral. So in the end I had to make a call about that but I wanted to talk as much as I possibly could about finding something else besides either or something that is both something that is neither something that is in the middle and that was Buddhism that was Thailand thank you.

[00:45:22] Okay in case you didn't hear it she said that's brilliant. You. Yes I appreciate that. Yeah I just didn't want to answer the question actually.

[00:45:33] And that's another e-mail I get twice a day at this point. People wanting to know what happens next. And I say I no idea what happens next. And they say if you don't know who knows.

[00:45:45] And you know and the answer of course is nobody knows I made it I made it up. It isn't it isn't it is not a real story it is only a true story.

[00:45:54] I I I knew that people want to know and I understand that they want to know and I feel gratified that they want to know. But I don't want them to know I want them to live in this place of not knowing. And that was another thing I was really grateful to my publisher for you know it. People don't like to be frustrated at the end of books they've read. And even though the author has like really English Teacher Li reason for why that is the case. People don't like to be frustrated at the end of books and I want them to feel frustrated at the end of this book. So you and I have a little compromise position. That's what it is something the mental make that up. So the question was How did I write about all of these siblings when I am one of two and have only one child. And the answer is I made them up and that and that to me is is one of the kind of strange dissonances that that has that has

also been true. I've been touring around is that everybody really thinks that this is a true story loosely disguised. And everybody really wants that to be the case.

[00:47:05] And to me it feels really made up because there are all of these kids and I only have one kid. And the difference between five kids and one kid has to be all the difference in the world. That seems so different to me.

[00:47:20] I mean those kids up and that was really fun at the beginning. I did not have a hope. I have a chart somewhere at home I should dig it up actually about whether it bought me more to have five sisters and the youngest becomes a boy or four sisters and it's a boy.

[00:47:37] And then the boy becomes a girl. And you know I played with all of those things and which of these things bought me more and in the end having these four boys like puppies you know rolling on top of each other was too good to pass up.

[00:47:53] And it's very freeing to be able to make things you know. And for whatever it's worth the Thailand stuff I had to go and see that I did not have and did not have four extra children just to be able to write this book.

[00:48:11] It was a lack of commitment on my part. When you get right down to

[00:48:18] The paperback versus Tharaka ever yes interesting question was whether I was expecting to have a different response to the paperback than the hardcover. My question is expecting or terrified. Because expecting no I don't think so. I am newly worried. You know it goes out again and I get up here again and it's and I'm doing some more events. And one of the things is hardcover books are more money than people are used to paying for people they don't know. And so the people who are willing to do so are people who I don't know have some faith in my ability to be literary I guess or you know they're interested in the novel as a novel you know.

[00:49:11] So one of the things that is true is that a lot of book clubs are not interested. They won't read it until it comes out in paperback. And I have. And you know as I say this the uptick in this in the last few weeks has been market people who are emailing me saying I didn't want to read this book. I never would have read this book. I was embarrassed to be seen with this book. But my book club picked it and so I do think it is going to go out to a lot more. And in fact I must hope one must hope.

[00:49:41] I must hope that this book reaches a lot of people who wouldn't have found the hardcover wouldn't have sorted out wouldn't have been willing to people who are going to have it thrust upon them. And I don't know what will happen.

[00:49:57] You know one of the really unfortunate things and I don't know whether it's the human condition or it's just my human condition is that once one person e-mails me really nasty things I think everyone is going to e-mail me really nasty things. You kind of. I mean so I didn't want people to be

able to e-mail me directly so they have to fill out a form on my website he took down my address and so that means that it comes to me as a form and I have to open it up clear to me from the from the subject line. The first line of the e-mail whether it's going to be nasty or not and I click on them like you know because it's just terrifying for no reason at all.

[00:50:37] I have to be tougher.

[00:50:38] And yet you know you have this you have this fear. And so I think that the more people who come to it unawares the more of them are going to be made angry.

[00:50:50] I don't think it's a very angering book I don't think it's a very controversial book. We shall see. You know these are the games that your publisher plays they put the e-book on sale for 299 a couple of weeks ago. So just I mean huge scads of people bought it who you know because it was cheap because it's less expensive than a cup of coffee. And that is awesome. Some of them have not been followed through and have written to express their lack of joy and so I don't know. I don't know. I think it will go out into the world. And I must lead it and see what happens.

[00:51:31] Oh I hope so.

[00:51:34] Jenny's question was if I think it will be banned anywhere and I think it will be awesome. GARCIA When your book banned places did it increase sales.

[00:51:43] That was awesome. I don't know. I don't know.

[00:51:50] I mean I really find it difficult to imagine what there is to object to.

[00:51:58] Much indeed.

[00:52:00] People have a I mean people object to things and you know people object to things. You know what though actually. And this is the other thing that I feel like is really important to say the people who send me really nasty things. There's actually no evidence at all that they've read the book. I don't even think they read the article that causes them to say nasty things. I think they read the headline or they saw other people emailing me nasty things and then they wrote me nasty things. Do you know Twitter is this giant threat of if you can divorce yourself from it emotionally it's just like all of these people getting really worked up. We just had for them but also for me but mostly for them. I don't think it's because they read it. I hope so I say bring it on. Yes let's ban things.

[00:52:46] It will save Oh good. Awesome yes.

[00:52:55] Yes. Yes he goes. Those are the people who are emailing. Thank you so very

[00:53:12] Yes. So for those of you who are listening at home the comment was. That it was great. I don't know if I can rephrase the comment. But

[00:53:21] But this idea that it is about parenting whatsoever shows up about parenting and I'm so glad you think so because that was exactly my intention going in as I said when I started the book it wasn't necessarily clear to me that this was in fact the direction I was going to go in my own life. And it also wasn't clear to me that the direction the book was going to go either and I just thought it was a good metaphor because most families won't have a transgender kid but almost all families with kids you know sometimes those kids are gender nonconforming almost all of them.

[00:53:53] And for sure all of them are sometimes nonconforming somehow and they fall so much end that is not the middle. They are rude in whatever way.

[00:54:04] And and that makes parenting I mean parenting is just words very difficult. And it is. And I think the reason why it's difficult is it's hard to make a plan for and it is also simultaneously the most important thing you were doing. No pressure. And so you reconciling those two things. It's the kind of thing you want to write a book about. And I am very pleased that you feel like it spoke to speak to that and indeed I think the mother had kind of snuck in. I

[00:54:32] Know I went into this book I thought I would change up the gender roles between the two parents as much as possible. So you know she's the scientist and she's a logical one and she's the breadwinner and and she's a writer and he's an artist and he stays home and he is like Oh bring it on and we'll just take it as it comes it's going to create. And I you know and I tried to switch them and I did along those lines. But she still came out the mother you know like there was nothing I could do about it and I really did try. But you know motherhood man it all. It's bigger than all of the other things and I found that that it was like that was hardwired I couldn't ride around that.

[00:55:08] What's interesting yes so that's a really good question.

[00:55:14] If I am both Jewish and Buddhist it's interesting I've actually done a few events for Jewish communities. These are people who invited me because I was Jewish. They were not emailing me to invite Jesus into my heart really. They were coming at it from a different angle and they really wanted to be. So their complaint was they wanted to be more Jewish and less and less Buddhist. I find that those traditions actually work really well together have a whole spiel about it. I feel like they they work together mostly because it is this notion of asking questions and seeking this path not because it has been handed down to you and told you that you must do it but because the act of seeking it is what's important and is what is performing spirituality. So so you know some of that just comes from going to yoga or Sunday. But I did some research.

[00:56:25] Yes. Wow that's a lot of questions. OK. So they were about the movie anti rape the writes about reading my books backwards and do I miss something.

[00:56:36] Oh and what's next. Well let's start with that one. I'm not telling you that one's an easy one I'm not. I'm not talking about it.

[00:56:43] I'm writing the next novel. I feel like you have to keep writing them because they're so daunting that if you stop then you're standing at the bottom of the sound and you think there's no way whereas if you know if you just keep at it and you never stop and look at the top of the mountain it's fine you just keep walking up it. I don't talk about it. I also am wrong about it. Look I could tell you what it's about right now and then you would I hope read it and some I hope a small number of years and think to yourself man she just had a different book but no no no we just went I was just what I thought it was about was not what it was about. So I try not to talk about it at the beginning because it just makes me look like a moron.

[00:57:19] Oh yes you read them in reverse order and my.

[00:57:21] And it's very interesting to me. I have not read them in the reverse order any order I don't. So you know when you edit when you write a book you write it and then you edited eighty nine thousand times. By the time I finished copy edits for the like First Past pages for this book I could almost recite it. I had read it so many times. I'm not going to read it now. I just did. And you know what book touring I did an event in October for my second book and they had all of these. They it was at a college.

[00:57:52] They had read it for class and they have really specific questions that they sent me in advance that I could not answer because I did not remember and I thought you know I mean I should really read this book again so I can answer these questions and then after I sat down I will read this book again and I read like the first page and thought oh no no no.

[00:58:12] So I don't look at them again. So I'm very interested in you're reading them backwards and how my writing has evolved. But you'll have to tell me because I don't know the answer to that question and hope never to find. Oh in movie TV rights I will say this.

[00:58:31] Ok. So when you talked it all.

[00:58:33] Book. Book publishing happens in New York and everyone in New York is my agent and my editor and my publisher and they're all like everything is horrible. We all going to die. No one is ever going to write. Publishing is dead. No one will ever write another book. You are never going to publish anything again.

[00:58:52] Everything is horrible when you talk to people in Hollywood. They're like the most a thing we've ever read. Q Are you just a writer for your time.

[00:59:01] We're going to meet some giants this movie and say we're all going to be reassured on the fantastic neither of these things are true because the middle away you say you have to be somewhere in the middle. So they're very enthusiastic. And I think it's because it's sunny and I'm totally with them because I remember the son fondly and it was awesome.

[00:59:21] But I don't have any idea whether any of it is either real or true. It is a puzzlement to me. It is interesting to write. An adaptation of your own stuff because I know these characters really really well at this point. And then they say well what happened in the second season and I said No I have no I have not.

[00:59:45] I mean I have no idea.

[00:59:47] Because for me it ends and as I say I don't want to answer the question. And there are two you know like I spent 18 months fretting about. A gender neutral third person pronoun and that's nothing compared to casting. You know this is just a whole nother ball game as far as that goes. So I don't know. So I'm not sure I answered any of your three questions but that's what I do now.

[01:00:15] We have time for we have time for one more question.

[01:00:18] Tell me yes this beautiful generous question was How do I keep all of these voices in response some of which were not very kind to this book out of my head. When I write the next book I don't. I spend a lot of time curled up in a ball hole in the corner of my living room hoping that it goes away. I mean some of the you know it's hard to keep that stuff. So one of the things is I don't read reviews. I never never read reviews of the books I never have I don't read the comments on Amazon I don't read the comments on Goodreads. I can see by looking at the picture that they're mostly positive and they might make me feel better but they wouldn't make me feel better because all of the positive ones I would say yes yes I'm wonderful I'm also like look at this person who hated my haircut on the you know on the back of the back and I get those voices out of my head. That said one of the most important skills you need as a writer is not looking at the Internet. So the more people send me really nasty e-mails the more I just don't check my e-mail and then I get a lot more work. So that is what I tell myself that I'm being so much more productive because people are mean to me on Twitter so I don't go on Twitter.

[01:01:33] Problem solved.

[01:01:35] Now all of the problems some of the problems that I kind of feel like that's that's where the world is now. You know we can't solve all the problems yourself some of the problems for today and taking up a new business from

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