



Library podcast

David Guterson discusses 'Turn Around Time'

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[00:00:36] Hi, everybody. Thank you all for being here. I am Stesha Brandon, the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at the Seattle Public Library. And as we begin this evening, I would like to acknowledge that we're gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. We honor their elders past and present, and we thank them for their stewardship of this land. Welcome to this evening's event with David Guterson and Justin Gibbens, presented in partnership with Mountaineers Books and Elliott Bay Book Company. Thank you to our authors series sponsor Gary Kunis and Seattle City of Literature and to the Seattle Times for generous promotional support of library programs. Finally, we're 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, thank you very much for your support. So without further ado, I'm delighted to welcome Kate Rogers from Mountaineers Books who will introduce tonight's program.

[00:01:44] I as she said, my name is Kate Rogers and the editor in chief of Mountaineers Books, a leading national publisher of outdoor titles based here in Seattle. We publish across a wide range of outdoor topics, including guidebooks, natural histories, adventure stories, photography, conservation and sustainable practice here at home and on the trail. In 2020 will actually be celebrating our 60th anniversary of award winning nonprofit publishing. And we now have 700 titles in print, many of which are available here at the library. And in fact, I especially want to thank everyone for being here tonight to support three local independent literary institutions. Seattle Public Library, Elliott Bay Book Company and Mountaineers Books. Thank you very much. I don't think David Guterson really needs an introduction. He's an American novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist and journalist. He's the author of eleven books, including the award winning *Snow Falling on Cedars* and a collection of poetry called

Songs for a Summons. So to say it was a surprise when he e-mailed Mountaineers Books out of the blue about a new project is a bit of an understatement. And when I first learned the details about *Turn Around Time*, I was frankly a bit skeptical. Poetry. Book length poetry and written by one of the region's most famous novelists.

[00:03:24] How in the world that have anything to do with our outdoor list of guidebooks, adventure and conservation? But the more I talk to David and the more I learned about the project, I realized that it was in fact a perfect fit. *Turn Around Time* is in many ways a guide to the trail of life. Sharing insight and metaphor about a wilderness journey that we all must take. And David recognized that like any good guidebook, it would benefit from maps. In this case, the delicate yet striking art by Justin Gibbens, a Washington artist whose work is here tonight and act as signposts in the book to the trail description. In addition to being a guide, *Turn Around Time* is also clearly an adventure, an evocative, compelling and at times seemingly dangerous hike through landscapes, both familiar and strange. And finally, it's an appeal. A gentle but firm call to care for and love the natural world around us, to make sure we can all travel through it, celebrate it and safely return. Collaborating on this walking poem with David and with Justin was a labor of love for all involved and truly an honor for me and for Mountaineers Books. So please join me tonight in welcoming David Guterson.

[00:04:54] Thank you, Kate. I think the first order of business is to make sure everybody can hear up at the top.

[00:05:01] Is it good? OK. I'm probably going to do a bit of rambling tonight.

[00:05:07] And this book, I think sort of lends itself to that because the book is in certain regards, a sort of a ramble, along the trails that are familiar to me in the Cascades and the Olympics and sort of an amalgam of places I know well in both ranges. And I've spent essentially a lifetime traveling the same trails over and over again, really in different weathers in all seasons. And that's really the inspiration for the book. I want to start first by thanking the Seattle Public Library by for having, having me here tonight. Beautiful venue and also for selecting *Turn Around Time* as one of its Peak Picks, which means a handful of books, I believe quarterly that are chosen. The library buys a significant number so that the number of holds is reduced in the time that people have to wait to read a book is reduced. And I'm just really grateful that the library has something like 250 copies so the book can be read. You know, this season and the wait times are reduced. I'm really grateful to the library for that. You know, Kate touched on the sort of curious anomaly of me coming to Mountaineer Books with with poetry. She also mentioned that sometimes, you know, poets have come to Mountaineers Books and thought, you know, maybe this is the right publisher for me. And they've always said, no, we don't publish poetry. And now Kate doesn't have that excuse

any more at her disposal. But Mountaineers Books was the right place for me, you know, for a lot of reasons for a lot of very personal reasons. And I would say first and foremost, it's because the guidebooks that have been at the heart of Mountaineer Books for 60 years have been sort of the bread and butter, the foundation of the publishing house.

[00:07:12] Were books that mattered to me hugely and continue to matter to me hugely. So is there early in the 60s that the first guidebooks came out before that there really weren't any you were sort of on your own and they were the, you know, hundred trips in the North Cascades or Olympics in South Cascades books by Bob and Ira Spring and the Harvey Manning books. And then came the Fred Beckey's three volume guides to Cascades, and then Robert L. Wood's book about the trails in the Olympics and the Olympic climbers guides. And these were my absolute Bibles and or texts as a hiker. I've had multiple editions of all of these books and I've beaten them up and battered them and made use of them in the wild for not only for the specifics of knowing where I am, but also as sheer entertainment, because these are great writers in their own right. The writers of these of these guidebooks, my my Robert L. Wood, Olympic Trail Guide, I I remember one edition. I still have bits and pieces of the binding completely came apart. The pages are scattered all over the place as well. They should be. And my Olympic climbers guide, I often took with me. And, you know, leave in the tent or in the campsite. While I did something and come back literally chewed by voles, you know, bits and pieces of paper coming off, and holes in the text and had to buy a further edition. These, simply, books that have really mattered to me, books that I've been in love with.

[00:08:47] And you know, it's the reason why ultimately the reason why I came to the Mountaineers with this book. I'll just read a little bit from the introduction about those texts that are meant so much to me.

[00:09:02] So starting with Robert L Wood's *Olympic Mountain Trail Guide*, Fred Beckey's three-volume *Cascade Alpine Guide*, Ira Spring, Bob Spring and Harvey Manning's many hiking volumes and Olympic Mountain Rescues Climbers Guide to the Olympic Mountains. These mid to late 20th century books once formed a library of local urtext for climbers and foot travelers in the mountains of western Washington. Each had navigational efficacy and each had local centric charms. The Spring Brothers and Manning always celebrated, celebratory and lighthearted, traded in faux crankiness and affectionate complaints. Crowds, mosquitos, I-90 development. Beckey rigorously raised himself so as not to subvert attentiveness to nuance. No climber could blame him for a misconstrued pitch. Wood was conscientious and scrupulous to a fault prone to nostalgia, stylistically lush and the collectively written climber's guide to the Olympic Mountains, a compilation of summary route descriptions incorporate in its pages ref. art and tourist syntax. All these books were good back country companions and could be browsed at home too, as goads to new places or as reprimands for past bad judgment. Whereas indulgences in memory, they were fingers pointing at the moon.

[00:10:28] Now, my book, *Turn Around Time* right here has no place in this down to earth pantheon.

[00:10:35] It's a trail guided best only figuratively and only if one conceives of life as a journey. I hope it avoids a guide's perilous presumptions that it speaks to just one way among the myriad, that it admits to ambiguity and is willing to get lost, that it moves toward the unknown, that it tends toward to reach forever out of reach, that it leads readers into a world both familiar and strange, familiar as a kind of inchoate inner language, strange in its conjunctions and perplexing visitations. I've refused here into intimate clarity where none indeed exists for fear of leading readers to a cul de sac.

[00:11:18] I'm really happy to join the pantheon of guidebooks published by by the Mountaineers, a real honor and a real, real pleasure for me. One of those books.

[00:11:34] I, I hiked once with a good friend in the Olympics up the Obstruction Point towards Grand Valley, and rather than going down to the lakes, we took off cross-country towards the base and below McCartney Peak and I went to climb McCartney Peak and we got we got near the summit. And my friend, who was an avid climber and alpinist really sort of a crazy guy who would on a whim, on a whim he rode his bike from Bainbridge to Mt. Rainier and climbed it. And he went with me, you know, on a lark for exercise. Anyway, we got within a couple hundred feet of the summit of McCartney Peak, and he stopped and said, let's quit here. And, you know, I said, that's, I like that idea. And I began to think about that is as time went on, you know, the notion of the importance of the summit, whether it really actually mattered to get there and this sort of practicing for life that might go with stopping short, you know, cultivating the ability to stop short. I admired the idea. We were on our way back and we found a young guy, you know, waiting, waiting for us who'd been watching us through binoculars. And he told us he was from back east. We walked back to the parking lot with him and he said he was going to spend a week in the Olympics. And I gave him my Robert L. Wood Olympic Trail Guide. I said, you know, use it while you're here. It's a gift. You can send it back if you want some day. And and he did, which was really great. So my Robert L. Wood just you know, it survived yet another adventure traveling across country in the mail. Yeah. Those books have just been just been really important to me and so has my time.

[00:13:20] Then in the mountains, in ways that I can't begin, begin to describe the meaning, the value, the psychological and emotional value that it has for me to be in the mountains and not just because of the natural landscape, not just because of all flora and fauna, but because of what it means to be moving on foot as a human being and as a writer. I mean, there is a long

tradition for writers to do their best thinking while in motion, while on foot. And there's a long tradition of walking poets among whom, you know, Wordsworth is one of the most famous. That's perhaps not true, but something like the guy put 15000 miles on his legs and wrote his poetry while ambulatory, a sort of mad man.

[00:14:09] There really is something to be said for walking and writing. The two go together and they've gone together for me over the years. Definitely so. I recently read a book called *The Old Ways* by Robert MacFarlane, in which he says that paths can be thought of as offering not only means of traversing space, but also ways of feeling, being and knowing. And it's absolutely true that paths are more than a way of traversing space. They are a way of traversing life. They are a way of being, being in the world. And they've meant it's certainly meant a lot to me over time to be on trails and to be on trails, frankly, with other people. I've really enjoyed my hiking partners over the years. You know, we tend to think of nature and solitude. We tend to think of our relationship to the natural world as being sort of what it's all about. But if we're honest, a lot of our time on the trail has to do with other people. And we end up engrossed in a matter of conversation that we may not happen for us, may not happen for us elsewhere a full day of leapfrogging, perhaps being behind somebody and then ahead of them, you know, speaking ahead while someone is behind and yelling at somebody, who is back and finding yourself in a kind of conversation that's far ranging that may be very, very removed from where you are, a conversation that seems to have its own rolling, travelling nature.

[00:15:46] You know, these trail trips lend themselves to a kind of interrelationship between human beings that I have found, you know, intensely meaningful. And I've dedicated this book to my my hiking partners over the year for just that reason. Meaningful relationships, not just with friends, but with with family as well. With my sons, my brothers here tonight. My brother is also an author and he's the author of three books now with more to come and nominated for an Edgar, an Agatha in a Washington Book Award. And younger than me, by a few years, I drag him about. I remember dragging him up Mount Stewart when he was 15 or so. I don't know. We got up there and it was time to come down and, you know, the Northwest style like really raw and primitive, let's say that that involves just getting on your ass and riding down. Well, he had never done it before. So I said, well it's really easy?

[00:16:50] You just use this ice axes as a router and you just use the heels of your boots as brakes, and you control your speed and and everything will be fine. And he took off and within about a minute he had sprawled over and was riding down the hill like this. I could see air between him and the rocks, you know. And you got down there. I wanted to apologize publicly for that while I had the chance.

[00:17:14] Yeah.

[00:17:14] I made my wife go with me to Lake Quinault Lodge for our honeymoon because that seemed to me it was January 1st. You know, frozen ground. But of course, we're in the Olympics. So what can be wrong with that? I've had a lot of good time with friends, relatives, people I love out in the woods, on the trails. And that's been as meaningful to me as anything else. And you will you will find that in this book. It might seem. Well, if I have any reputation as a writer at all, I suppose it's as a novelist. You know, my middle name in some ways is *Snow Falling on Cedars*. And so I've written five novels and I've written two story collections. I've written two nonfiction books. I've done a lot of journalism. And I never wrote any poetry. And yet I always loved poetry and I grew up loving poetry because my father could recite certain poems aloud and in really moving away and did. And it got under my skin. You know, the power of just the beauty of words, whether there was a narrative or not. Poetry is such a powerful emotionally and psychologically powerful art form. And I grew to love it. And I read it, you know, with with autonomy and privately and with love as a teenager. And, and then I taught poetry with a lot of love as a high school teacher for 10 years. And yet, through all of that, I never wrote any. I don't know why there seem to be some kind of wall. It seemed as if I was a fiction writer and not a poet. And then, I don't know, seven or eight years ago, some kind of door opened for me.

[00:19:02] I'm not sure why, really, but it definitely had to do with the natural world. All of my early poems had to do with the natural world. All of them had to do with immersion in the landscape. They all had to do with the earth. So clearly that had something to do with inspiring me to do give it a try. As a poet, there are certain subjects, certain topics, certain themes that lend themselves to story. And there are others that don't. They lend themselves to poetry. And for me, the natural world celebratory to celebrate the beauty of the natural world. Poetry is the form. And so I entered with some trepidation, knowing in some way that I didn't belong. You know, that it really takes a commitment and a vision to be a poet. And it's a lifelong work and it's a deep commitment. And for me, it was a sideline, you know, so I really didn't have a lot of confidence. But I also felt like this is a good thing in the middle of life to be doing something new, to be trying something new, to try to be trying to get better at something and to work my way into it. So I began to write poems seven or eight years ago, and eventually I began to publish them in small literary periodicals here and there. And then I collected them in this book, which is called *Songs for a Summons*. So you can think about the title songs for, I felt summoned. These were the songs that came out of my summons to poetry, which was published by Lost Horse Press in in 2014.

[00:20:33] And this is a series of individual discrete poems. Many of them have to do with the natural world. And then I went back to fiction, but I felt like I had a grounding. And a couple of years ago, more than a couple of years ago. One day in the summer, after doing a

considerable amount of hiking on mountain trails, I began to hear the music of this book. And it felt like walking. It felt like walking on a trail, it had that kind of rhythm. It was propulsive. I could hear the music in my head. And in about a two week period I wrote this book in a great sort of sense of ecstasy, really, as if a gift had been granted to me in the music of these words. Did that make me feel like a poet? Not really. But, I honored I honored the impulse. I'm going to click this forward to see if I can get this right, OK. Start with this. I need to, I need to talk a little bit more than a little bit about the artwork that goes with the poem. This poem doesn't stand alone. And this poem doesn't work is just a poem. This poem works in symbiosis with imagery, and it can't work any other way. It can't do its job in the world without this complementing art, which can only be achieved by somebody who really honored the poem by reading it really closely and reading it multiple times and giving it some deep thought and and being challenged by it.

[00:22:06] As an artist and that's Justin Gibbens who's who's here tonight sitting in the front row. How did I find Justin or how did we find Justin? Mountaineers, Mountaineers Books? Well, we began to do what you do. We vetted artists by going to their websites and looked at the artwork of dozens and dozens of artists and winnowed it down. And always, always I kept, I kept returning to what Justin did. And I kept returning to it for for a few reasons, but I've got this problem. I can't read if I don't take the glasses off. I can't see you. If. I'm stuck. So I'm going to take these off and go here for a minute and talk a little bit more about about Justin. When we finally landed on Justin, as the artist that we wanted to bring out bring on board for this project. You know. It seemed really important to me to be collaborating with somebody that I liked that I could get along with. I really felt some trepidation about getting intimately involved creatively and artistically with somebody. Where the vibe just didn't feel good. You know, who wants to be there? If things don't work that way? I mean, I've tried enough collaborations with people to know the difference that, you know, that it really matters to be happy and to feel good about the person as a person.

[00:23:43] And so I made up a reason to visit Justin at his home. I got in touch with him and I said nothing about the book. I just said that I've noticed your art online. And I think it's really great. And I'd love to visit you in your studio and just, you know, check check it out, if that's OK. Justin said, sure. And so I came over and sort of wandered around and I knew right away that he was the right guy just by the way he lived. I love the way that Justin kept his studio, for example. And I could I could tell by the shape of the studio, by the feel of the studio that Justin was had it together and the manner of his life, the way in which he lived, the way in which he kept his world together. I knew right away I felt I felt an affinity. And then I noticed meeting the guy and talking to the guy that he was super humble, super modest, super understated, didn't make a big deal about himself. You knew underneath about underneath you could see underneath. That was a very deep, smart person, which is exactly what I was hoping for. And so Justin read the book.

[00:24:55] And this is essentially the opening image. So before you begin the poem, before you read the first words of the poem, you're looking at this. And I looked at this for quite some time, trying to work my way into Justin's consciousness. You know, like what was this guy thinking relative to the poem when he did this? Because I'm no art critic and I'm not an artist. So I can only bring kind of a raw layperson's analysis to what this is all about. Maybe we'll have a beer later and Justin will laugh at me because I'm totally wrong. But you can't really be wrong about art because everybody brings their own sensibility to it. So I'll just go ahead. Well, here we have somebody that looks to me at least like geological strata, as if we're standing at a cliff face and we're looking at these various areas over time, geologic eras. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, perhaps is sort of the immediate thing that strikes me. I feel like I'm looking at strata and I see that at least half of them, you know, are essentially below ground, which is a way of saying you don't see everything that matters, do you, in life. You don't see everything that matters. A lot of what matters is hidden. It's underground. It's beneath which I appreciate with regard to this book, and when you look at what's underground and what matters, you know, at base, you've got this, this set of stones, rounded stones. At first you think, well, that's a bit odd and strata, because looking at this cliff face from here, this rising vertical cliff face, that isn't really what it looks like. So this isn't the actual real interpreter. This isn't really presenting the real world. This is an abstraction.

[00:26:54] This is an idea. This is something felt. And what I see is I am looking down. I have a taut view of a path. That at the very fundamental base of this image is a path, a walking path that we're looking at from the top. And then we'd go up to this distressing and disturbing reality of the skeleton. You know, the thing we don't want to think about that there we are buried for millions and millions of years, interred this way. But the thing we have to think about thing we have to come to terms with the thing we have no choice about. And if you look at that closely, you can see that once again, it doesn't really quite make sense as strata because we're not looking at the side of the skeleton. Again, it's a top view.

[00:27:40] And you could even see the subtle impressions around the skeleton that suggest a top view, a kind of a hole in which this skeleton is interred.

[00:27:51] And then we move up and we see how the surface is rooted, rooted in this subterranean space.

[00:28:02] The trees are rooted. And then really the sense of strata disappears and we move off into the distance. And as we move off into the distance, the sense of moving outward in space further and further outward, away from the immediate trees in our foreground. What do

we get? We get a sense of no longer of strate, but of three dimensions of this world. That, look, my point is there is a whole lot going on here that's easy to miss. And that Justin would just simply let me miss. You know, he doesn't talk about himself and he doesn't talk about how great he is. He is great. He's a great he's a great artist.

[00:28:42] And I I own a huge debt. I really do. It's great stuff.

[00:28:49] Ok. I think I probably should read a bit from this poem.

[00:28:55] And so one of one of the things I'm doing along the way here in *Turn Around Time* is reflecting on my experience of flora and fauna, which sort of the most obvious thing about being out there. Yeah, that you run into the, it's the raw substance, the raw living things that are that are in our world. And one of the most sort of immediate experiences we have in this part of the world with regard to this is the camp robber or the Gray Jay. If you're a trail walker here in the Pacific Northwest, you know about these birds. They're pretty much everywhere. And whenever you stop and get out something to eat, they collect around you. Usually there's a number of them. There's one here. There's one here. A couple of you know, they surround you and they're intimately close. They're waiting for you to turn your head so they can swoop down and grab something and fly off. They have here. Let's let's take a look forward here.

[00:30:05] There they are.

[00:30:07] They're camp robbers, they're known actually in the vernacular as camp robbers, and they.

[00:30:15] I end up having mixed feelings about them. Because on the one hand, they're an irritant. You know, they're pestering you. They're thieves. And on the other hand, they are company. They you they are actually introducing themselves. You have a certain intimacy with creatures where they're not shying away. You know, they're not the ever stealthy, disappearing cougar. This is the animal that comes to you. The animal that wants to be close to you for whatever reason. It as much as you're irritated, perhaps by the presence of this animal. You're also engaged. And so I walk with mixed feelings about the gray jay, I want to see the gray jay. I want my friend the gray jay. But I'm also irritated. They are nefarious and judicious keepers of distance, blunt, beaked, boreal, territorial, torrid slime, mold feeders.

[00:31:16] Killers. Invaders. Thieves, screamers. Tree cash fillers.

[00:31:22] They breed in winter and betray each other with no less ruthless regard than ours, and yet we applaud them as they limit our estrangement or for regaling us with beggary and pomp. Away temporarily from our many useful gadgets, we turn to jays for a modicum of merriment. Sugar coating these cutthroat survivors with another brand or forum of loss. All those lone friendless moments in the woods redeemed by the silence of grey jays.

[00:31:59] Another creature I love to run into is this, the squirrel.

[00:32:06] And there's two kinds of squirrels that you meet, you know, in our woods. And I've conflated them a bit in the poem. So one of them is the Northern Flying Squirrel, which you don't see that often because they're really active at about 4:00 in the morning. So unless you're sort of awake and watching or in the right place, you probably don't see them. But they look a little bit like pancakes dropping out of the canopy with four little limbs and a head and they come flopping down. They're not really flying. They're just jumping a long ways. And as soon as they hit the bowl of a tree, the trunk of a tree, they immediately scramble around to the back side. They never they never stop. They hit. And then they diagonally, laterally move around to the back of the tree. That's because they're one of the favorite prey animals of owls. And so they're constantly in motion. They scitter about and they jump about. And you've seen this, too, this odd sort of syncopated gait and rhythm. This indecisive, this this back and forthness that you see sometimes, if you're fortunate, early in the morning with the northern flying, but more often with more ubiquitous and more frequently seen Douglas Squirrel, you see them, you see they're odd creatures. It's as you sometimes have this experience when you're driving, you know, one of them jumps out into the road and goes back and forth, back, skitters, back and forth.

[00:33:27] And you're trying not to hit it. You have no idea what it's going to do. And it feels like it doesn't know what it's going to do, but it does that because it has this constant awareness that it any second this owl is going to swoop down and grab it. And by the way, there's this great intricate ecological relationship between the Douglas Squirrel, the northern and the owls and truffles. So on the west slopes of the Olympics, you know, sort of buried under the duff are a lot of truffles, actually, which of course, we think of as a delicacy. And they're expensive. But the squirrels love them. They can't help themselves. They know they go to the forest floor and start digging for truffles, that they're putting themselves in danger. And they are. And it's when they do that, that the that the owls swoop down. So these three truffles, the squirrels and the owls live in a kind of symbiosis, a kind of food chain that's you know, you can witness it on the west side slopes of the Olympics. So. You also see out there when trees fall, how they create a kind of geometry, they cross each other like pickup sticks. And so sometimes you see you

often see squirrels and that sort of terrain. We've got a lot of logs crossing each other. So I write about them this way.

[00:34:51] Fallen trees in whimsical geometries will lend to our woods, their comic trajectories with humor more epic than the brisk fits of squirrels who are, by comparison, vaudevillians. One must admire their instant reversals, disengenuous flim flaming starts and most marvelous of all, how some seem to fly. At four o'clock in the morning, these autumn midden builders, truffle nibblers and trail graders pungently arrest our forward progress with their brief but demanding performances on logs or by scrabbling and spiraling over bark.

[00:35:34] So the gray jay, the squirrel.

[00:35:40] And then these.

[00:35:42] I love Justin's interpretation of the bracket fungi commonly known as the conk. You've seen them, if you've walked in our woods, these sort of odd shell like shelf like bracket, like white, sturdy fungi growing on the sides of trees. They're healthy and large and they often sort of bring you to a halt in terms of tone and hue. You're walking through this green, shady landscape and you see this sort of white thing up in the tree and. I I happen to love them. I just happen to love encountering them. I always stop, just as I do for squirrels just to watch. These things are so inert you wouldn't think they would like, like watching a barnacle. It just sits there. But the fact that it just sits there is really what what interests me about them. And I've had arguments about this with fellow hikers who aren't really very interested and want to move on.

[00:36:48] So I've ended up writing about them this way.

[00:36:53] Our sullen forest. I don't remember having been this way before because I haven't and I have lost the hang of looking at a lichen for its own sake. Though I have to add that I have not yet given up on conks as they are called by loggers. That fruity fungus holds my interest for its reason. Less insistence, in fact, because it stays with trees through every season. I have been its fan through some dissension. These clams arboreal our lovely, bald, tenacious. They persist and will not go away like hooves or plates or shelves or shells. They offer blunt resistance. On high they keep stiff upper lips above the snow line. A little comic in their bluff pronouncement. I exist and will not stop or fall because you want me to.

[00:37:45] However incommensurate forms of pleasure I appear. Behold me here, a woody carbuncle with no fear of God or you just up here weathering the weather minus savoir faire or elegance whatsoever. A blot, a stub, a nub, a but, an addendum, a stubborn, solitary.

[00:38:08] Did know this an attacker? One who plies the trade of symbiosis for a while, and then a tree assassin? And as for you, you are just a passer with a tendency to gawk at musket balls like me with laughter. In short, when you're in view, I give the finger. I am the finger. Eyes forward, traveller. And that is really how they strike me. I love their defiance.

[00:38:38] They are fantastic. Now let's see. Night creatures.

[00:38:50] That's for me, or just the opposite from what you get with conks, conks are in your face. You can't miss them. They stand out and they give their blustery message, right, but bats are almost like an idea as opposed to reality.

[00:39:07] You don't really see them. You think you see them. It's not really something visual that happens. It's more an intimation of their presence. In fact, one of the sections of this poem is called Do Bats Exist? I mean, you can go to a place like Carlsbad Cavern, of course, and you can obviously, you know, authenticate the existence of bats. But when you're out in the Olympics, you're not really ever quite sure. Something's going on up there in the canopy at night. But what exactly is it? And then you get to have the argument with your fellow camper. Oh, it's bats. No, it's not. OK. The bat, you say, is felt not seen inferred from hints overhead soft flits from rustling spirals that might be yells from downdrafts, flutters, surges, quivers, agitation, sudden shivers intimated by nighttime shutters, a billowing surmise and deeper darkness.

[00:40:05] A bare suggestion. Never lit, a guess on wings, a wavering loft, a punctuated roiling somewhere aloft, a switching shadow and a canopy's matrix. A ripple plummet streak disappearance here but not here. Gone by definition.

[00:40:27] I like this. This is a Justin's wonderful rendition of Old Snow.

[00:40:35] You know, there is a big part of the year where is a little tough to get out because even the trailheads in the roads are in a cesspool because of snow. And so, you know, as we get into late February and March, the certain trailheads begin to open up the lower ones. And I

begin to make my forays. And week by week, the new trails open up and I can move higher and higher.

[00:40:55] And of course, in in the as the weeks go by into spring, you begin to experience what I think of as old snow. That is this is the snow from months ago that's been melting and it's the last of it. And you've just got this, uh, you know, sense of something disappearing, something at its end, something hanging on. And I I can't say that I'm really made melancholy by old snow but there's something transitory about it. It's a little bit disturbing. You know, it's gonna be gone pretty soon and it's hanging on.

[00:41:31] And so I have mixed feelings walking through terrain off of old snow. And I write about it this way, ravaged, stained, dimpled, traipsed. It shrinks in shade as if to say it isn't done with living. It hasn't had enough of being. It regrets. Spring's defeat clings, but shrinks rejects acceptance. There's nothing to be gained by early acquiescence, no good or grace in melting old snows opposed to everything and never hails a brighter future. Instead, it's dense and cavities, dark and morose in March, but gone by April. It's replaced by [inaudible] and lichen. In other words, these last dregs are inching back and dragging it out before going.

[00:42:22] Ok. Well, enough said about, you know, what I encounter in terms of flora, fauna, the natural world, I want to get on to something else that's significant in this poem, which is the felt fabric, the emotional quality, the inner quality of trail travel.

[00:42:38] You know, there's something I don't see addressed very often that we actually move in an inner landscape as we move through this exterior landscape, as we walk down the trail. A lot of what we are experiencing this is inner. We have an inner monologue that's constant. In fact, it's exacerbated by trail walking, something, the mind begins to move and it moves wherever it moves. And it is a significant part of the experience of being abroad in the natural world. So here we go. I can't remember these switchbacks either, because going up and coming down, neither is familiar. Such tight reversals deride and remind us we don't belong in this. Rather, weather cliff face cuts occasion toe bang by dint of fruits and rocks. We fade down, we go toward home together, splayed and voicing ligamentous complaints as if they weren't just something we make suffering on top of pain. Our slants precipitous, an unfair gradient, our drops a drag if we don't sing and louder sing of our tatters and our dress. But meanwhile, I guess I have to ache because this zigzagry got dog legs and hair pins. OK, I'm keeping trying to keep some track of time here and realizing that I'm not going to be able to read everything that I've I've had in mind. But there is one more piece here at least that I'd like to read. It has to do with what I call trail affection. So we have all kinds of relationship relationships with other people that go on out there and we walk with people who can drive us nuts because they talk too much. You know, you wish they'd shut up so you could just be

where you are not to listen and go on and on about whatever it is that you wanted to leave behind. You know, you can have that reaction and you can run into people coming the opposite direction and you can experience some strange kind of social anxieties around those little fleeting moments.

[00:44:50] You know, people are a part of it. People are a big part of it. But there's another piece of it that I really enjoy, which I call trail affection, which happens to me. I'll be walking along behind one of my sons and I'll start getting a lump in my throat just watching my son move through the landscape or a friend, you know, somebody who's really been good to me like a true friend. And I'm moving through the landscape with this person. And I begin to feel, you know, affection. I mean, there might be a stronger word for it, but I really like this person that I'm with. They may not be saying a word. They may not be aware of me 10 yards behind them, feeling that what I feel, but I'm feeling it. And I. And so I say in the poem, look, I'll make it up to you. I'll walk your walk if you want me to I'll break trail when gloom is too much for us. I'll shoulder our lot in life. Shoot our umbrella up instead of blaming you instead of praying. I'll kick a branch from your path with panache today, whatever it takes.

[00:45:50] Although I'm tired. I'll stub a toe so you don't have to wrap your knees in gratitude because my altimeter reads you, my spyglass sees you. I have a map of you. It's made of reverie. Even as we walk I'll infer you from your gestures with every step. I'll implore you to address me in terms I can get next to. Give me a sign. Say you see me, warn me. Goad me, yell into the breeze. Let me read your poems, your poem, your leaves.

[00:46:25] So I'm going to open up the questions pretty quick here. It's getting close to 8:00, but I want to first just mention a few books about walking about the natural world that I really admire and think highly of. You could consider if you're interested in this subject. And one of them is a great writer, Rebecca Solnit's book *Wanderlust*, which makes great connections between walking and thinking, walking and culture and the role of walking historically. I also really like the poet Simon Armitage's book called *Walking Home A Poet's Journey*. Armitage takes a walk in the deep walks the Pennine Way in England, and he sets it up in a great way. He's called in advance to all the little villages he's going to end up with each day. And he says, I'm going to give a reading. I'm going to put out a hat. I'm trying to collect enough money to keep my trip active. And so he gives a reading every night after having spent a day on the Pennine Way, a book about poetry and walking, which is really brilliant. I mentioned earlier, Robert MacFarlane's, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*. And that is an incredible book. This guy knows everything. Vast amounts of natural history, geology, all literature, a huge amount of just general erudition and just a pleasure to read his prose. A couple of local books, one that's somehow gone under the radar.

[00:47:55] And then this book is really great by a guy named John Sauder. It's called *Poets on the Peaks*. And it's not so much about walking as it is about the time that these beat poets. Gary Snyder, Philip Waylon and Jack Kerouac spent in the North Cascades. So again, a book about our part of the world, the natural world and and great poets who have been inspired, particularly Desolation Peak and lookout there, where all three of them spent some time. Finally, a book called *A Cascade-Olympic Natural History* by Daniel Mathews, which is a trail side reference book which I love. It's come out in two or three different editions, has a different name now. It's called *Natural History of the Pacific Northwest Mountains*, that Daniel Mathews not only knows everything there is to know about flora, fauna, geology, etc. mean it's the ultimate field field guide. But he's a pleasure to read. I mean, it's an entertaining book. It's worth the weight in your pack. I don't know where my book, you know, *Turn Around Time* fits in. But really, here's my hope. My hope is that that somehow this book might participate in your life as something that you can put in your pack, literally or figuratively or maybe into someone else's pack.

[00:49:16] And by that, I mean, I guess I think ironically, it's a pretty good book for younger people, people in their 20s and 30s. You know, you may think a book like this, *Turn Around Time*, second half of life, turning back, returning to sources, you know, oh, this is a book for people at midlife and beyond. But actually, I think it'd be really a healthy, instructive, good thing for somebody in their 20s and 30s to have this book, you know, just to hold it on the bookshelf, just to know that it exists and maybe go to it and find something there useful. Because *Turn Around Time*, you know, it's easy to miss it comes earlier than you think. And you can make your mistakes pretty early in the journey.

[00:49:53] So, look, I. I.

[00:50:01] I'm just thrilled, actually, to have this book out. And I'm gonna be reading from it, you know, all fall all over the place and try to make a connection, you know, with people. Well, with regard to this material, because I really I really believe in it, not only is this a book celebratory of our part of the world, but a book that I hope has a role in in people's lives. Thank you for coming out tonight. And. So we have a couple of traveling microphones if people have have questions. Justin is here to answer questions about the artwork.

[00:50:48] Thanks for the great thanks for the great reflections. So what trail on the northwest has most inspired you to write poetry?

[00:50:57] Why? What trail? Well, you know, for the past.

[00:51:06] Thirty-five to forty years I've been living in Kitsap County, which turns me towards the Olympics, and I have to say in terms of trail travel, that's the majority of where I spend my time and I with where I feel the deepest kind of affection for those places.

[00:51:23] I end up travelling the same trails over and over again and they mean a lot to me.

[00:51:29] But when you get into the heart of wilderness off trail for days on end, that's unforgettable. And so traversing the Bailey Range, I've done it twice.

[00:51:42] Climbing Mount Olympus, you know, being in the wilderness heart of the Olympics where it spreads out around you in all directions.

[00:51:51] I think there's something really powerful for me in memory of those trips and those places.

[00:52:02] There's a question down front on your side there, John.

[00:52:08] Please wait for the mic in just one sec.

[00:52:14] Thanks. I love your description of being in the mountains, and it kind of reminds me of a painter when you write your poetry. Are you on the trail or do you create these wonderful things when you return home off the trail?

[00:52:29] Well, I find that when I'm walking on a trail and whether I'm solo or not, if I'm with someone else, there's still a lot of solo time.

[00:52:38] As you know, if you've walked with other people and that solo time is filled with an inner monologue, that is often for me poetic.

[00:52:46] I mean, I'm hearing, you know, lines. They're coming to me. They're being gifted to me, I guess. And it has a lot of it actually has been written about this, about the cognitive

physiology of walking in relationship to language. It's an interesting subject. That something about walking, inspires, instigates, sort of different brands of Cerebra, different ways of being cognitively aware.

[00:53:11] And some of it is ultimately poetic. And so walking, you know, does bring it forth. No question about it.

[00:53:21] So I noticed you talked about kind of different relationships between things in terms of writing, like you talked about the relationship between like walking in nature and poetry and also how this particular poem couldn't stand alone. It had to exist in the context of the artwork. Broadening that, do you think that creative writing is an inherently collaborative art form like one that needs that sort of external stimuli? Or do you find it more to be an internal OK through no fault of yours

[00:53:55] I didn't hear because, you know, my ears aren't great. I heard some of it. And I know you asked something about. Do I feel that creative writing is in some regards, collaborative? Actually, no. You know, I spend the majority of my time just sitting there by myself, locked in my own space with no sense of collaborating with anybody. Very solo sort of work. And I have pushed myself out of that in the last few years, intentionally in an interest, with an interest in seeing what it's like to collaborate and to see, you know, what can be produced in collaboration that maybe cannot be produced when one works solo. And this book has been has been part of that for me. I think they're both they both have possibilities. They have different kinds of possibilities, but they both have power.

[00:54:58] Hi, I'm Lena. I'm 19 and I'm also from the Kitsap area. I hopped on the ferry to come over today and I'm wondering in a time where our nature is increasingly disappearing. Do you find your connection with the trails and the mountains and the force in this beautiful area to be increasingly close? Or how do you how would you express your changing relationship with the environment?

[00:55:30] Well, there are a couple of parts to that.

[00:55:35] I mean, look, is that the way that the going back to the Olympics, the way that it's preserved? You know, you never feel that when you're in the park that it is strictly in the strict sense in any sort of danger. And yet it's always changing. It's changing in subtle ways in response to subtle changes.

[00:55:53] So, for example, I go often to this area where you can get up into the high country, Baldy and Tyler Peaks in the Olympics, northeast corner of the Olympics. And every year, the meadow in between these two peaks or Boulder Creek, the valley of Boulder Creek, it's changing is becoming less of a meadow, is becoming more trees. It's becoming more treed for reasons that have to do with climate change. You can note these things viscerally by returning to the same trails year after year. The reality of climate change. It may be subtle, but it's evident. So you might think, well, I'm in the park. You know, nothing's changed. It's all protected but is not protected.

[00:56:35] It is as vulnerable, you know, to global matters as any as any other place.

[00:56:43] The other thing, of course, is, you know, you're always changing. I'm always changing. So every year that I go back to the mountains, they're different because I'm different. It's never you never had the same experience twice. You never walk the same trail twice.

[00:56:55] You really don't.

[00:56:58] Thank you. The question I have, the two questions I have is for Justin. First is, did the author, David, suggest any of the art pieces that you did? And the second part of the question is, as you got into it and started on the art pieces, did you make changes thinking, well, I could illustrate that idea better if I moved in that direction?

[00:57:31] Yes, certainly.

[00:57:35] First question was, how did we come about this storyboard of imagery is kind of right. How did we come up with it? So. Before I even thought about making any images, I just spent several days, it felt like longer than that, perhaps trying to really absorb this poem. I must admit, I don't consume a whole lot of poetry. So it took me a certain amount of time to just feel like I was even starting to get a grasp of what we were talking about here. And there's certain passages that were certainly more obvious and resilient with with images that it wasn't hard for me think, OK. I know it'll be appropriate here for this section, but the passage of the passages that were a little more.

[00:58:28] Let's just say layered or a little more convoluted where the images that come forth in the text seem to happen and unfold on almost on top of one another where it was, it presented a real challenge for me to try to distill down a singular image that would be effective in this moment. That's going to try to represent this whole entire passage here. And so that's when I certainly called upon David and and Kate, and it was the three of us really working in tandem to come up with with all of the imagery for the entire text. And we we decided about how many we wanted and how they would be peppered throughout the text. And I think for the obvious ones, there wasn't too much discussion. But it was it was in those passages where. There wasn't a concrete resilient image that.

[00:59:26] Was obvious. So how do we how do we approach those sections? And in terms of revising revisions and not being satisfied with, I personally thought a lot of the images were perfectly fine until I showed them to these two.

[00:59:46] Maybe just one or two, but, you know, I think as it is expected with this kind of collaboration.

[00:59:58] I have an idea in mind. I.

[01:00:02] Kind of developed a somewhat preliminary sketch thinking, this is what I was feeling for this section and then I would get the OK. Yeah, that's it. Let's flesh this out a little bit. I think you're moving in the right direction and in some cases. I think we captured exactly what was needed with the initial sketch that I didn't have to revise. And so if you look at some of the images or are almost more impressionistic, I would say this first one here, that was that was it not on very nice paper, kind of a cocktail napkin sketch, if you if you will. And and that seemed a boy.

[01:00:41] David, your description of that.

[01:00:44] I wish I could say all that was going through my head when I worked that one out. But, you know, and then other images, there's quite a bit more refinement. So. With the images that look a little more labored over, we wanted to certainly be be on the same page that we have, we're moving in the right direction and this is the image that's going to suffice. So.

[01:01:12] I think we have. Thank you.

[01:01:14] We have a question up there and then we'll have the last question down here. And I did want to make a comment that your poem book does look like a very tasty coffee book to read. Also, my question is like from beginning to end, from the point that you determine I'm going to write this poem book. But how long was the span between you thinking about it and it coming to fruition?

[01:01:45] Mm hmm. I would say as I touched on this along the way. This particular book happened very quickly. So. Mm hmm. Because I regularly take, you know, these trail hikes. I, I was in a period where I was doing quite a few of them in succession. And you know how it is when you do something repetitively, when you shut your eyes, you're still doing it. Like if you walk and walk and walk and you shut your eyes, and you're still walking. Well, that was happening to me, but it was becoming language. I was beginning to sing here, you know, in a pro fluent manner with propulsion. And the words leapt out and the poems appeared in about a two week, two week period. Yeah.

[01:02:36] Oh, yeah.

[01:02:36] Illustrations only took a week and a half. [Laughter] Now Justin, he worked on these images over a six month period and did about 100 different drafts. Yeah.

[01:02:50] Ok. We have one final question here.

[01:02:56] Yeah. When I read the Sunday Seattle Times magazine story about your book, it really moved me. Your passion to show this wilderness with the idea of preservation. And I couldn't help but contrast that with just a few days before when I read about this huge development at Mt. Rainier in the area, and I thought what a contrast that was from from my horrible feeling about what that will do to this wilderness versus what your book is trying to say. Do you want to comment on that project?

[01:03:33] I really regret that in the course of the evening that I sort of failed to touch on this really essential, critical, all important point, which is ultimately what this book is, is an expression of love, love for the world, the miracle of this place that we call home, that I that I embrace, you know, with an actual like feeling in my gut of love the way you would feel about people. I feel that way about this place. And I believe that without that. We don't have a chance. That we, unless people are actually love the planet. We're going to make it unlivable

place. It starts from love everything. I think everything good ultimately starts from, from love. This book is it is in some ways an expression of that. Just love of place. Love of the world. Embodied in poetry and art. And with the hope of inspiring some of the same and others in the hope ultimately that we preserve what's what we have.

[01:04:44] How many? OK. Last question.

[01:04:49] That previous comment got me really excited because I just like to take a moment to say that this exact thing is happening with forest turning into developments, especially with the suburbs around Seattle.

[01:05:05] So it's happening in Kitsap County where I live. And this Thursday there's gonna be a public hearing. I heard about it in the Kitsap Sun that they're going to try to trade twenty-seven acres of land, forested land in Silverdale for a commercial property in the in the name of generating revenue for education. But I believe that there are other ways to generate revenue for education without destroying our environment that I will have to inherit.

[01:05:33] So if anyone could come and come with me and support me in this this Thursday, come talk to me after too.

[01:05:40] Thank you.

[01:05:41] I want to add the Mountaineer Books has an imprint called Braided River, which is absolutely about conservation and using the emotional power of words and images to inspire people to work on behalf of of the earth. And it's a huge part of what the publishing house is about. And another reason why I'm really proud to be on their list anyway. Last question that's it. Thank you for coming out tonight. I'll be signing books. [Applause]

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