



# Library podcast

## Seattle Urban Book Expo Part 1

[00:00:05] Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our web site at [www.spl.org](http://www.spl.org). To learn how you can help the library foundation support The Seattle Public Library go to [foundation.spl.org](http://foundation.spl.org)

[00:00:36] This podcast is being presented in two parts. You are listening to Part 1.

[00:00:42] It is now my pleasure to introduce Jeffrey Cheatham II. Jeffrey is the author of three books for children: *The Family Jones and the Eggs of Rex*, *Why is Jane So Mad?* and his newest *High Blue Sky*. He's also the founder of the Seattle Urban Book Expo, which is taking place this coming Saturday at Northwest African American Museum. And I'm also thrilled that Jeffrey is on the board of Seattle City of Literature as well. Jeff is going to talk a little bit about Seattle Urban Book Expo and then introduce tonight's featured speakers. So please help me welcome Jeffrey Cheatham II.

[00:01:18] Good evening. When I got the idea to create the Seattle Urban Book Expo, the concept was to create a space for people who look like me to share their stories their way. I never would have imagined that the support would have been as powerful as as has been for the past few years. Now to the point where I'm able to create a platform for authors of color to finally control their narratives. So tonight is a kickoff for the fourth Seattle Urban Book Expo to really highlight the work that all of us are doing, not only as authors and writers, but as listeners and as friends and as allies. It is very important that we use this as a stepping stone to bridge the gap of understanding. And that's what stories do they help you understand - a person's voice, a person's culture, a person's mindset, perspective. Because if I don't understand you that means I can't help you. So I won't be up here too long. As you know, we have very, very powerful women up here today that's going to share their stories and share their narratives.

[00:02:31] I want to leave almost, end my little thing with a quote from a recent article on Seattle Review of Books. And to me, this quote captures what I'm trying to do with the Seattle Urban Book Expo. And also, I believe the people who support me, what they want to see the Seattle Urban Book Expo accomplish. "At a time when white people are moving into

traditionally POC spaces in Seattle. It's more important than ever to claim time and space to talk about why black voices are so necessary for Seattle right now. For three years, the Seattle Urban Book Expo has been devoted to exactly that. Making space for voices to be heard.” That's why Paul Constant from The Seattle Review of Books.

[00:03:16] So tonight's event Why Women Write is going to be conducted with the emcee of Dr. Joye Hardiman over there. So I appreciate her. We have Rosa Booker as well as other readers.

[00:03:38] Martine Kalaw right there, as well as one of the other authors, Nikkita Oliver.

[00:03:46] And last but certainly, certainly not least, Dr. Marcia Tate Arunga.

[00:03:53] Thank you so much.

[00:03:56] So for those that are here, I am grateful. I'm thankful that you took time out of your day, that you went into battle with the traffic to make it here. So thank you so much. And I promise you will not leave here disappointed today. So welcome to the Seattle Urban Book Expo presents Why Women Write.

[00:06:26] Good evening. I want to welcome everyone here, I was very, very honored to be asked to be the emcee of this event because it's it's very important. I have a I have a quote on my email that says, “Until Lions start writing down their own stories, the hunter will always be the hero.” And I think we're in this incredible vortex of time in which voices are emerging, voices that we have not heard before, voices that are as essential to our humanity and our well-being. And this tonight is one of those occasions where we are going to hear four incredible voices, each coming from different places, giving true testament to the notion that there is not a single story. If we're talking about the black experience, the woman's experience or the human experience, but it is the multiplicity of each of our stories and the integrity and the authorship that in fact will make us all whole. And so it's my deep, deep pleasure to introduce our first reader and our first reader. Today, will will come and read from her work, which is a really profound and an important work. And you'll get a chance to hear her voice and her passion. And so without further ado, I'd like to introduce Martine Kalaw.

[00:07:53] Oh, did I get it wrong. Oh, OK.

[00:07:56] Well, you're so beautiful and perfect. So welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome, please.

[00:08:02] Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for being here. My name is Martine Kalaw. I hail from Washington, D.C. and New York City, respectively. On the East Coast it's about 10 p.m. now. So I look like I need sleep. It's because it's almost my bedtime.

[00:08:22] So a little bit about me. I am a TEDx speaker. Companies bring me and hire me to come in and deliver keynote talks. I have written for the Huffington Post on the concept in their area of immigration. I am an advocate and a survivor of the undocumented immigrant experience. And so tonight, you know what I really want to talk to you about is how I got to where I got to and share a little bit about my journey in my book. I also like to emphasize that before, you know, right now I'm a U.S. citizen. I am a consultant. I run my own business where I support organizations that are going through mergers and acquisitions in terms of creating productivity for their employees through training programs, professional development - what have you. And I am a graduate of Hamilton College in upstate New York. Yeah. Hamilton! And I got my Master's in Public Administration with the focus on Immigration Law at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. I like to emphasize all these things, not to just brag about myself, but really to highlight that I am the true face of the undocumented immigrant that we hear about in the news in the media. I sound like the average undocumented immigrant that we don't necessarily see represented in the news or the media. I embody the journey of that undocumented immigrant. How did I become undocumented? I came to the U.S.

[00:10:21] when I was 4 years old legally with my mother to pursue the American dream. It's really important that I mention that because the misconception is or what people don't realize is the number one driver of undocumented immigrants are individuals that come to the U.S. legally and are late overstays. And I think it's important to highlight that I became a stateless and an orphan and undocumented for eleven years of my life. I spent seven years in deportation proceedings fearing being sentenced to a detention facility indefinitely because the country that I was born in, Zambia, did not recognize me as a citizen. The country that my mother and father were from DR Congo did not recognize me as a citizen. And although I spent 20 years in the U.S., the U.S. did not recognize me as a U.S. citizen, and so at the end of the day, I was able to navigate through this very broken system. And as a result of two strangers' acts of kindness and three tools that I leveraged I was able to become a U.S. citizen. And so that is what I talk about in my book, and that is the work that I do today. I'm in the process of building a foundation so that I can replicate what occurred for me to be where I am today for others. And so with that, it love to read as an excerpt from my book.

[00:12:08] If you would allow me to. The chapter is called Moules et Frites and the B-word. And for those of you who don't know moules et frites is, it's just mussels and fries in French. OK, here you go. When I buried my mother, I had also buried my memories of her mistreatment to honor her. But one day in a law office in the once famous Statler Towers in Buffalo, New York, I was asked by my attorney to betray her in order to win my freedom in the land of the free. How audacious of him to even suggest, This immigration hearing needed to be the final, because I was running out of stamina and coping mechanisms. Just how long could I maintain the charade of being a normal American girl? John James, my pro bono lawyer, had assured me that everything would go smoothly as the August 9th, 2004 date approached. Today's appointment was an actual hearing rather than a master calendar appointment. It meant that I would be able to testify and present my witnesses on my behalf. "Why don't you come into my office for a second?" John James commanded the morning of my hearing, interrupting my

reverie. "What's wrong?" "In my office." I went. I knew John well enough by now to distinguish between his condescension and concern.

[00:13:37] He had a plain face which offered him little distinction, the kind of face that you could look at for hours. But you wouldn't be able to confirm in a police lineup. His baldness was the only thing that stood out. I could imagine running into this man who had control over my life. Ten years later in the street and trying to figure out just where I knew him from. "Listen," he said, sitting at the edge of his desk, almost hovering over me as my sweaty palms clasp each corner of my chair. "Nothing's wrong. You alluded to the fact that your mom was abusive to you. Did she ever hit you?" My eyes widen and a sudden panic rushed over my face. Please don't let this conversation go where I think it was headed. He may have asked a follow up question, but my mind was elsewhere. I notice how plain John's office was for a lawyer, and I wondered if it was because he didn't make enough money as a pro-bono attorney. Shouldn't he have had photos of Supreme Court Justice Judges on his walls or something? He had a scattering of law books, but I expected to see more of them. At least his desk was covered in paperwork, like all the lawyers I'd seen on television. The carpeting should have been nicer, but instead it was dingy. I couldn't lie to my lawyer, so I confessed.

[00:14:59] "Yeah." I said with my head hung low and tears streaming down my face as if I had just pled guilty awaiting my sentencing. Ya Marie didn't just hit me. She used to beat the expletive out of me. But I wanted to remain mild in my accusations so I wouldn't share any more detail. If John dug further, should I also talk about my mother's verbal assault that pushed me to the brink of death? No, I couldn't. This wasn't how today was supposed to play out. This entire case was supposed to be built against my Auntie Amelie and not my mother. My mom's real name was Marie Louise. Which sounds better in French. My mom's native language. Most Americans just called her Louise. The Ya is like a prefix, which means sister. It's used as a sign of respect when speaking to an older sister. I must have heard her sisters referring to her as your Ya Marie when I was a toddler and started to do the same, I never referred to her as my mom in all the years that she was alive. So that is just an excerpt from the first chapter of my book entitled *Illegal Among Us: A Stateless Woman's Quest for Citizenship*. I know that I'm out of time, but I look forward to the panel discussion later where I can engage with questions from the audience. Thank you.

[00:16:42] The world is so small, I, too, am from Buffalo, New York. And so I know the Statler Hotel because that's where we went for our senior prom. And as you were talking I thought about the contradictions of you fighting for your citizenship and me trying to fight with my corset and get ready for the senior prom, very, very different experience of time and place. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that and sharing your heart. And I think that's what in many, many ways the people who write are very courageous because you make yourselves vulnerable. You've basically give us a piece of yourself, a piece of your lessons learned and wisdom earned. That may be very painful, but then, in fact, can elevate and transform us. Our next author, Rosa Booker, is going to come up and share her story.

[00:17:34] It's a different story, but equally as powerful, equally as important. Please come and share with us.

[00:17:48] Good evening, everyone, thank all of you for being here tonight. I will give a quick disclaimer because I see some young ears in the room that this is a very explicit passage just so that you are aware ahead of time, whatever you choose. Totally up to you. And I also say that for the adult ears in the room, as I have done several readings, that some of my content has made people feel uncomfortable. And if you need to walk out and leave. Please do not worry. I will not be offended. I will absolutely understand. I began writing this novel entitled *The Monster in My Room* in 2010 and I begin it never knowing that it would come this far. I absolutely wrote this initially for myself.

[00:18:39] And as time has gone on, I realize that while it has helped me, it's not for me. It is for everyone.

[00:18:48] The story, the passage I'm going to read to you in this book, the main character, Olivia, who is a petite, very dark brown skinned woman with long, curly hair, who has been made fun of a lot of her life, for her appearance, has dealt with that, as well as sexual trauma and abuse. She has begun writing a story. And so this is a book within a book, a passage that I'm going to read to you now is written as the memoir of the main character of this novel. As she's writing from her childhood and to her senior and to her college years.

[00:19:26] Her memoirs are written in the voice of the age she was at the time that she's experiencing. This chapter in the main character, Olivia's book is her Chapter 9 entitled "So Where's the Hot Tub?"

[00:19:41] Now that I was a senior, I had my own car and my job at the fabric store, I helped my mom Stevie with household stuff. To be more accurate, I helped myself with household stuff. Since Stevie was rarely there. I bought groceries with her money, but cooked most of my own meals. So this new cashier at the grocery store caught my eye before you judge me, I was lonely and determined that all the guys couldn't be vultures and rattlesnakes. Well, this guy was super cute. He was on his own. Had a good job with his own car and his own apartment. He told me that he graduated from high school last year, and since he couldn't afford college, this job was helping him save up for tuition. Yeah, I bought that. He didn't have any reason to lie to me, I was just a local grocery store customer. I knew he was getting into me by the few subtle hints like, for instance, when he would see me in his line he would reach around and put is this aisle is closed sign right behind my food so that he could walk me personally to my car even if I only had three items.

[00:20:53] And then one day it happened, he slipped his number in my grocery bag. At first I wasn't even going to call him. I just thought about like how weird it would be if things didn't work out. I'd have to avoid his line and maybe I can even shop at that store anymore. And what if it did go well? And I had to tell my mom, Stevie, I'm seeing this guy that bags my groceries.

Well, she never let me hear the end of that. Marry on up, she'd always say. OK, well, so, you know I called him, right? He really had a lot to say over the phone. And it felt really good to have someone pass the time with. It was refreshing to have a guy and not talk about my looks or my body or what he wanted to do with me. We talked about books and school and art and music and it was so much fun. He'd make me laugh huge belly laughs and I just cried with his impressions and jokes. After a few weeks, he began to ask about my family. Now I don't know why he had to ruin such a good thing, but I told him enough to pacify his inquiry and quickly moved on. He found out that I was alone most of the time at home, and he expressed he wanted to be with me in person.

[00:21:59] He wanted to see my laugh. And this was the first time he ever mentioned my looks or my face or anything about the two of us being together. And I wasn't sure how to respond, so I didn't. I just kept the conversation going. And it was more than a week that passed before he brought it up again. And somehow we got on topic of swimming. Now, we started off with school sports and then talents and then something other things that we did in high school and me mentioning wanting to always learn how to swim turned out to be the perfect hook to get me over to his place. He offered to train me in his swimming pool at his apartment. Turns out he was some sort of excellent swimmer. Then, right when I griped about it being too cold for a non heated pool, he brought up the fact that we could jump in the hot tub after. I always wanted to get in a hot tub and I tried to hide my excitement as to seem not too eager. Nevertheless, I was very interested. He was very attractive and I'm the one that brought it up so he couldn't be planning anything.

[00:22:58] What the heck? I thought. Within twenty five minutes he picked me up at my door. Within five we were on the freeway, and soon in his apartment, It was dimly lit. But I took into account that it was nighttime and there was no daylight coming through the windows. He had the table set up with some glasses and some drinks. I walked in behind him holding my bath towel and I had my swimsuit on under my sweats. So I sat with him in his dining room and he introduced me to a game called quarters. I wasn't really competitive, but I guess I was a natural at this game because he poured me a tall glass of Italian soda and said each time I bounce a quarter in the glass, I could take a sip and vice versa. "And then the hot tub?" I asked and he nodded in agreement. He had just learned the game from his cousin and wanted me to see how fun it was. But after 20 minutes of playing and three refills of my glass, I realized it wasn't Italian soda that we'd been drinking after all, but some sort of sweet alcoholic drink. I mentioned getting bored with the game and he got up and walked to the back of my chair, hooked me under the armpits and walked me into his room.

[00:24:01] My eyes were blinking slowly and when my eyes came into focus, I was parallel with the bed and staring down on the pillow. I could barely lift my head, but was able to angle it down towards the dresser where I could see him dumping some powder into this Italian soda that he'd given me. He walked over to the bed and tilted my chin up to make me drink it. Right away, I snatched my face away and my head fell heavy on the bedsheets. The next blink, he was over me telling me how pretty I was and how beautiful my body was and how much he'd

enjoyed my company and the attention I was giving him. I heard him say something about when I first walked in the store and I let him walk me to my car. Next he was kissing me and groping me. And at first I kissed back. But suddenly his hand was down my pants and he flipped me over and I grumbled, “No, no, no” a few times, then elevated to yelling, “No!” But was muffled by my face being smashed into the mattress. My arms had no power to fight back. The legs I used to be able to move were dead, lifeless.

[00:25:06] I blacked out. Thank you.

[00:29:04] As we said before, the black woman experience is myriad. It's diverse, it is sometimes painful, it is sometimes joyful, but it is always expressive of itself. And we can express in lots of ways we can express in autobiography, we can express in fiction. We can also expressed in poetry. And so it is our honor to bring our next author to you. Nikkita Oliver, who is going to read from her book of poetry, which I think is going to be just delightful. I'm so excited.

[00:29:47] For all of the bricklayers.

[00:29:50] Some morning, a big old pile of bricks might fall on you. It will be an awful day, but you will make it through. You will go to sleep with them, old bricks piled around you. You'll wake up sore, tired, achy, you might cry. You might ask why you might lug a few of them bricks around with you. One day you'll be sitting in a room and someone is going to need a doorstop and you will give them a brick. Someone else will need to hold a banner in place and you will give them a brick.

[00:30:24] Someone else will need to build a wall around a fire pit or garden bed and you will give them some bricks. Suddenly you will realize you can build things people need with all them heavy old durable bricks.

[00:30:38] Bricks happen. When you're ready. Build good things with them.

[00:30:47] So I started writing as a child. I'm I'm dyslexic and that was not something I knew when I was younger. And when I was first learning to read. My first grade teacher actually told my mom that she did not think I would ever be a very strong reader. So I found my way into my school's library. And there was a book of poetry by Shel Silverstein called *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. And for a kid in my position, trying to learn to read the beauty of poetry was is that is often short. So it's not intimidating to start over again if I don't understand. But it also serves a purpose and meaning. And so I found myself devouring book after book of poetry because it both had the value of something I wanted to learn, but also was not intimidated when I got to the end of the page and realized I have no idea what this said. Slowly, I started doing a lot of writing of my own and I would take around with me composition notebooks everywhere. I had this little satchel bag and there would be a composition notebook for observations. There'd be a composition notebook for secrets. And then there was a composition book just for thoughts.

And I started to realize that the things that I was writing would have rhythm or have a particular flow, or sometimes it would rhyme that I was starting to naturally use metaphor as a way of thinking about the world around me.

[00:32:15] And so by virtue of something that could have been an issue, my teacher could have caused a huge problem for me in that moment. That's how the school to prison pipeline starts you all, by telling a young person they will not be good at school or reading, ended up being a transformative moment for me. So when I think about this poem Bricklayers, that's the first and most important thing about what writing and poetry and performance poetry has been for me is the opportunity to transform things. One of the authors I feel most inspired by is Octavia Butler. She talks about our ability to write things down and through that writing manifest, what we want to see. And so the other thing for me about writing is it's been an opportunity to look at the world around me. And when I see things that I want to change or I want to call out is to use writing as a tool for manifestation, that if I can see it on the paper, if I can imagine it and words, in I can create it in real life.

[00:33:15] I think it is say it, do it. in my world. Think it, say it, write it down, do it. And being a lawyer, I know that our world is made of words. That's all the law is, is a bunch of words someone's strung together to create a reality. So poetry is my opportunity to create the reality I want to see. And the last thing I'll say before reading another poem is that writing became a rite of passage for me growing up here on Turtle Island. And I call this place Turtle Island because that's how the native folks who have helped me live in Duwamish territory in a better way, call it. There are a lot of ways in which I have been detached from my true identity, who I really am of the people and places that I come from. And so writing has become a way to create those rites of passage that as I learn new things about who I truly am, I can commit that to paper, commit that to ink and commit that to storytelling. So I can make that a reality for myself because we cannot transform what we do not understand. And so transforming the world around me starts first with transforming myself.

[00:34:19] And I do that through pen and paper. So do me a favor. You wouldn't mind closing your eyes. Getting comfortable in your seat. Feeling your breath. Hushing the chatter in your mind. Can you hear us? Just over there.

[00:34:39] In the distance, under the fog of our nightmares, in the soil of our dreams, poking its little head up through the cracks in the concrete.

[00:34:50] It's right there. So close. Can you feel it?

[00:34:56] Surfacing through all the pain you still have not figured out is your glory. The cracks in your armor, the place where your light shines through the space in the pavement carved out by you for you, you are this. The poem who grew feet in the midst of the breaking.



[00:35:14] This is your breakthrough dawning on the tip of a pen sunsetting on your paper. This is the one where you fully emerge from the cocoon you built to survive. This is metamorphosis where you go from caterpillar to butterfly to something magical like a unicorn. This is the unraveling of who you became so you can be who you are. Here or there or alone or on the dark side of the moon. You are your own eclipse. You are your own sunshine. This is you being a poet. Writing a poem. Becoming more of you. This is a life lesson. Writing your own story. Being your own hero. Creating your own destiny. It is magic. The spinning of spells or sticks and stones may break your bones, but words. Words can heal you, help you, build you, immortalize you. This is more than immortality. It is your resurrection. This is building a monument to where you've come from. So you never forget. Never go back. Keep moving forward because that is how fire works when the pilot light of your heart is relit. When you finally start breathing again, you will remember to keep yourself warm. How to touch your own body like the holy relic it is. How to answer your own prayers for forgiveness, how to wash away shame, how to trust your intuition and let your gut be your guide. This is where you break down every wall built around you. Every mirror put up in someone else's image in hopes that you would forget who you are. The Phoenix rising from the ashes of what once was to embrace all that you've always been. This is you breaking open the flood gates, accepting the fallout of a natural disaster, not waiting on FEMA to clean up the mess we've made of love to restructure ravaged hearts into something more functional.

[00:37:01] This is about being more than functional. This is relearning how to love and be loved because no one can love you the way you love yourself. This is an act of love. A love note to the parts of yourself you'll one day learn to accept. A holy history for your sorrow. A testament to your joy. A prophecy of your triumph.

[00:37:24] This is you. An epic poem. A beautiful melody, the harmony to humanity, a tribute to what is. We find the strength to unfold our palms like a dandelion and blow.

[00:37:42] Thank you.

[00:37:47] So in December of last year, I had two hundred poems. Well, I guess it was more like October. 200 poems sitting in a laptop and a dream of publishing something. But I feel like for a lot of people, the fear of publishing is I don't have access to a publisher. I don't know how to publish. I don't think my writing is good enough. I don't know what to do with these contracts. And so I decided to figure out how do I self-publish and self-distribute a collection of poems. And so by going through all of these poems, I found a collection that I entitled Pebbles in My Shoes, which is, I'm a boxer. So it was inspired by Muhammad Ali, who said, "It isn't the mountain ahead to climb that wears you out. It is the pebble in your shoe." And so for me, this first collection of poems was the attempt to get the pebbles out of my shoe so I could move on to the next collection of poems and know that it's possible. So I fully published this on my own. I manage all the print and all of the distribution. And so I say that is an encouragement to people. You don't have to have a publisher to sell a thousand books. I'm at like seven hundred and fifty. Looking forward to getting rid of the last two hundred and fifty. But it is possible. And

so I want to really encourage folks to find the dandelions that you're holding on to and be willing to open your hand and take the chance to blow them across the landscape and know that the wonder of a dandelion is that it first spends the majority of its life growing its roots deep. And then it grows up tall. So the seeds have the ability to catch on the wind. Most of us are dandelions who have grown our roots deep. We're just too afraid to grow tall enough for the wind to catch our seeds. And this, for me was my first attempt at letting the wind catch my seeds to see my poetry reach a new space.

[00:39:49] Thank you so much you all. Wow, what a delight.

[00:39:58] What a real delight. As you were reading, two things came into my mind. One, the symbol of creativity in ancient Egypt in classical African civilization is a scarab and a scarab, as many of you know, is the symbol of a dung beetle. And what the dung beetle does is it finds a piece of mierda, feces. All right. Shit. And it looks at that which has been thrown away. And it puts and it lays its eggs. It lays its eggs because it sees that it sees everything is fertile ground, particularly that part that has been painful. That part then must be emerged and it rolls it and it plays with it and it nurtures it. And from it comes creativity. And so as I think about your work, that concept of making a way out of no way of creating beauty. Dandelions, we'd think of dandelions as something that, you know, that is horrible for our lawns. But you just give us another whole image of dandelions. And it turns out, according to the Facebook there now the best greens to eat this year. Right. Right. So thank you for praising our mother and dandelion.

[00:41:14] The last author that we're going to have before we have another drum interlude and then our questions and answers is Marcia Tate Arunga, who has written an allegory called *The Stolen Ones*. And she's going to come and speak to us about this journey. You've had a journey inside. We've had a journey from another country. We've had a journey into ourselves. And now we're going to go back globally and learn something about the integrity of people, black people.

[00:41:44] Marcia.

[00:41:51] All right, give it up for Dr. Hardiman.

[00:41:58] So awesome to always be in your presence whenever I have that chance. Good evening, everyone. So I was guided to write, just like I was guided to do research. And it came from the idea that we are living in a society where the omission of facts prevail. And so it was on a fateful day that I. Long story short, took seven women of African descent all the way from the Pacific Northwest to Kenya, East Africa. And there was an elder there who came to greet us at a wonderful event luncheon held in the backyard of our hostess. And one of our our colleagues had a photo album. So she was showing the elder.

[00:42:48] Oh, this is a African American church and this is an African American school. And this is an African American club. And she's showing her all these pictures. And the elder goes. Well, you keep calling yourselves African American. So we're from Africa do you come from?

[00:43:08] And by this time, I'm in the dialogue. We're having this very heated discussion. And I was trying to explain to her how people had not known the full history that, in fact, people had been taken not just from Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, but they had been taken from all many parts of Africa, dragged to the coastlines and taken even reach vitalized in some places. And this elder gets an epiphany. And she said, Oh!

[00:43:39] You must be the stolen ones.

[00:43:43] And now so we're like, OK, the stolen ones. Who were they? And she began to tell us the story. So I wrote the book based on the story. So I need your help because I rarely read from the book. But I am going to share with you what I think are some of the gifts that were given to me on that day. For one thing, we're going to practice Kiswahili.

[00:44:06] So you're going to practice the name of the young girl. And this was the beautiful young girl who lived. Her name is Nia. Can you say Nia? Thank you. And Nia is purpose. That's the meaning of of the name of this girl. And so I ask you, what might happen if to a village, to a people, if there was no purpose in their lives or in their community?

[00:44:31] But this young girl was a farmer so she was able to grow lots of fruits. She grew this fruit here, papaya.

[00:44:39] You may know it in Kiswahili. It's called *pau pau*.

[00:44:43] Very good. Very good. And she grew this in her field, in her garden and in Kiswahili. The garden is called *shamba*. Yes.

[00:44:54] Well, the little brother loved to eat what you probably think of as mango. And in Kiswahili, the mango is called my *maembe*. Oh, yes.

[00:45:07] And in Kenya, the my *maembe* grows really sweet and very, very succulent. She also managed to grow these fruits right here. Does anybody know what this is? Bananas. In Kenya, bananas are little tiny fruits you can pop in your mouth. Can we say in *ndizi*? Yes, that's the way you say banana. The N has a kind of a humming sound. So *ndizi* is the name of the bananas. And finally, she grew this fruit.

[00:45:43] Now, does anyone know what this fruit is?

[00:45:47] It is an orange. That was a trick question because the orange is green. But when you cut it in the middle, it is orange and very sweet also. And we in Kiswahili, we call that

*machungwa*. Very good. I wanted to put Kiswahili in this book because all of my life I was told that, oh, it's just ooga booga language. They're speaking as if it had no real meaning. And when I learned Kiswahili, I began to understand that there's a deep meaning in this language, and I wanted to share that with children. I also wanted to tell people about the home that Nia lived in and in Kiswahili. This is called *nyumbani*. Very good. And if you look, this hut is made is very ecologically sound because it's made from the earth. And what you do, you dig the earth up and you put water with it like mud, and you make these mud packs. And until you have built a whole hut and then you cover it with grass. Now, in the daytime, that heat is stuck in the walls. And so the room is cool. And at night, it releases the heat where you sleep.

[00:47:02] Now, isn't that ecologically perfect? And I wanted people to know that that is what people thought of, that they would make a monument that could go back to the earth from where it came. And then I wanted children to see the village, the home Nia where children play happily and where you see even adults beating the drum as we see these beautiful brothers beating the drum for us tonight. And the elders who sat thinking and making decisions on behalf of the village and that these were people who lived happily. And they as Nia was getting ready for her harvest. She was able to perform this duty. This duty is the point of libation to the ground to honor her ancestors. We call that in Kiswahili *Tambiko* Very good. So she would pour water to the ground and she would call the name of her ancestors. And she knew the name of at least ten even more of her ancestors when she poured the water to thank them for her harvest and for the fruits she would carry to the market.

[00:48:13] But before she went to the market, she had to choose her basket. And I wanted people to know that this was a tradition passed down from mother, from grandmother to grandchild, and that the basket was very important because if she learned to carry the basket, holding it like this, like we might carry something, she might hurt her back because it wouldn't be able to go for a long distance if she carried it with a handle.

[00:48:41] It would also disalign her body because it would make her lean too far to the one side. So Nia learned to carry the basket on her head.

[00:48:52] And that way she was anatomically correct. She could walk for long distances with the basket on her head without bringing injury to herself. And this was a practice that children practiced for many years until they became young women and were able to carry the basket on their head.

[00:49:14] And this is Nia on her way to the market looking so beautiful.

[00:49:20] Look at the posture of this beautiful girl on her way to the market. So I don't have to tell you, she gets to the market. She sells all of her fruits and her vegetables. And she was able to go to the market, which we call in Kiswahili *solkoni*. Very good. So she goes to the market. She sells all of her fruits and vegetables, and she's had even time to visit with their friends on the way home. She sold her fruits and vegetables for these shells right here. The

cowry shell. Can you say cowry? Thank you. So the cowry shell was the oldest form of money that we know of to humanity. It began in Africa through the trade of goods. Nia was on her way home thinking about all of the things that she had sold or fruits for and what she would find when she got home to show her family that she had been very successful at the market, when all of a sudden she heard rustling in the bushes. She turned around and she saw people coming together, strange creatures, and they grabbed her by her hands. They grabbed her by her feet, and they knocked her unconscious and dragged her all the way to the coastline, the edge of the land where the water was. And it was there that they threw her into a dark, cold place. And she was here with many people. There were faces down here asking her, who are you? Where are your people? Who are your people? And she could not understand them because she spoke a different language.

[00:51:00] Nia laid in the ground for many days, wondering if she would ever see her family again. And one day it was true that a ship came and that ship came right close to the building. The dark dungeon. As the doors open, she could hear people screaming and yelling and crying. And even she, too, was taken out of the dark dungeon and placed into an old, ugly ship that smelled horrible.

[00:51:31] And she sailed away, never to be seen again.

[00:51:34] Meanwhile, back at home, her family was wondering where she had gone. After a few days of waiting for her, the family got together. They called the men in the village. They said, we can't find our daughter. Where is she? Help us find her. The men gathered to search party. They went around the village looking for her. They even went to many villages and they were not able to find her. They even went to the edge of the land where the water was. But they found that no one was there because people had already gone.

[00:52:09] And it was then that they came back and said to the family, we are sorry, your daughter must be dead. And then they mourned her absence.

[00:52:19] It wasn't until one day when a traveler came to that land and he said, you know, I've been to the ocean waters. I've seen ships taking people away. And I think your daughter didn't die. I think your daughter was put on that ship to serve the purposes of the transatlantic slave trade. And that is when the people began to remember all of the people who had gone missing, not just their daughter, Nia, but the many young boys and girls who had gone missing through the years.

[00:52:52] And they began to think about it.

[00:52:55] And it says here that one day a traveler passing by the village told them how he had seen big ships passing through the ocean. He said that many of the young people who had been disappeared from the village were taken away and placed onto the ships. He declared that they were not dead, but instead that they were stolen. He explained that people had been

forced to board those horrible ships, never to be seen again. People thought of those who had gone missing. The hunters, gardeners, healers and thinkers who were so violently stolen from them.

[00:53:33] And they wept with despair.

[00:53:36] During that time, so many people were stolen from their homes. And when the village gathers to honor their ancestors, they always remember the stolen ones.

[00:53:48] Today we call that time *Maafa*. Can you say *Maafa*?

[00:53:54] Thank you. And I want to impress two people that 63 percent of the people who were taken out of Africa over 350 year period were between the ages of nine and twenty five years old.

[00:54:10] They were basically children. And they took those children because they believed that they would last the voyage that they would be able to work when they arrived in the new land and that they would have a longer lifespan of obedience and working and toiling. And so as Nia grew old, we could only imagine that she called together not all of her children, but maybe one or two who she had left, because we know that children were easily sold from their mothers. And when she came, she called two children together and she said, listen.

[00:54:46] I'm old now. And one day I will die, but I need you to know that you live in America, but your home is in Africa.


[00:54:56] Tell your children to tell their children and to tell their children so that one day you will return and find your family.

[00:55:06] And that is the end of the story. *Asante*.

[00:55:13] And so the reason I wrote this book was to really set the record straight.

[00:55:19] The way that I had learned about the history of the transatlantic slave trade was not a chance for me to have strong self-esteem or to feel good about my history in this country. And I thought that if I could write it as a children's book, that maybe the children would know when they get to those ages where they're learning about the transatlantic slave trade and that slavery existed and everybody's looking at them for answers. And they're also asking questions that there would be a book that they can go to and find that not that there was a history about where they left, that there were people that remembered them, and that not only were they stolen, we knew some of the people were stolen. We have been told that.

[00:56:06] But we had never been told that we were missed. And I thought being told that we were missed would have made my back a little straighter.



[00:56:16] And I wanted the children to always know this story exists so that their self-esteem will be strong and that their backs will be a little straighter.

[00:56:26] So with that, I think you.

[00:56:34] This concludes part one. Listen to part two for the conclusion of this podcast.

[00:56:43] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

