



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #373

00:00:01 **Peggy**

Good evening, not from the [unintelligible], or the podium at the Ballard Library. Miriam Twitchell conference room, but from my home office, flanked by one of my most beloved possessions, I'd like to welcome you all to reading number 373 of the It's About Time Writers Reading Series, finishing either its 30th complete year, or it It's 31st, I've lost track. All I know is that when it started it was in January 1990, you can do the math for me. This as I mentioned before I turned on the recording, this is being recorded and will be on the It's About Time Writers YouTube, as well as a Seattle Public Library podcast. This is a partner program with the Seattle Public Library and this event, as I mentioned, will be available, and I can let you know. We also have a Facebook group if you want to know about future events.

00:01:11 **Peggy**

Tonight's readers are all part of the Ballard Writers Collective, and I'd like to say just a few words about the Ballard Writers Collective. In 2010, I was inspired or perhaps jealous of some of the Seattle Seven writers and the alliances they were forming. And I decided, along with a few others, to start an alliance, that would be extremely inclusive in terms of genre, published, non-published, etc. I was convinced and proved correct that there were writers next door, practically every house, along the block. So I built the first event, which was in October 2010, as The Writer Next Door and I flushed out, even then at least 35 writers of all stages of the writing, publishing, or non publishing experiences, attend annual events, and many, many events in between, that most of my closest friends now, date back to people that I met through Ballard Writers, 10 years

ago, which when you turn 60, and it turns out that a lot of your closest friends are ones you've made since you're 50, pretty damn good.

00:02:38 **Peggy**

So I can't go a day without a sighting of a Ballard writer, and that's partly because I have a really good street view from my front porch, but I seriously mostly in person, obviously, at a distance, but it has been life-changing for many of us in the collaborations that have occurred have been wonderful. So, as the current curator for It's About Time, I am honored and I would also say efficient enough to have combined, what would have been the 11th annual Ballard Writers Collective reading with this December It's About Time Event. Really my only regret is that well, one that, you know, there isn't a December storm so that we could say, "God, isn't it good that we couldn't leave our houses," but also there was incredible generosity over the last years with people donating items for the Ballard Writers event. And each year, we would create gift baskets and make kind of a killing on those gift baskets through a raffle. And then those proceeds were able to go to a non-profit. So that's about the only regret I have.

00:03:55 **Peggy**

This year's beneficiary would have been the Ballard Senior Center. I'm a huge fan of Carlye Teal at Ballard Senior Center and their struggles have been numerous for years, and were certainly as with so many others, not helped at all by having, to close their doors, not being able to have their spring auction, not being able to have their rummage sales, not being able to have their pancake Santa breakfast. So I would urge all of you to if you would like to support them at this point to do so. Also there can be a silver or a sweet lining to that, they are selling their pies and scones for a mere ten to fifteen dollars and a set of scones for a very reasonable price. You just have to call and order and you can pick up on December 22nd and 23rd. So that's a way that you can help them and get something out of it as well.

00:04:51 **Peggy**

So it has been, there's been a precedent over the years to give a theme for the Ballard Writers. Sometimes it was a six word challenge, I can't even remember some of like the other things like 13, 777, I don't know, and when I kept on thinking of this year was, well what kept coming to mind was the elephant in the room? And that's a phrase that I understand now came out of actually, you know, addiction and recovery, like not talking about someone's addiction or you know what was going on. And so, it's evidently a fairly unique American phrase and it comes from supposedly denying the obvious, denying what should be obvious or what family members are in denial about? And so I kept thinking the elephant in the room. So obviously, we're on Zoom and not in the Ballard Library, because of the pandemic. So what's... that's the elephant in the room in terms of this event. So I got to wondering, what is the elephant in the room for the other writers? So as are either six or seven writers share with us tonight and I am also very open to open mic. I put out the question.

00:06:21 **Peggy**

What is the elephant in the room for you? Now, if they ignore the prompt which they may well do, then they can claim that the prompt is the elephant. So, I'd like to introduce our first reader Carol Levin. I knew her before there was a Ballard Writers Collective from having met her at an It's About Time and discovering that she was, well let's just say, I wanted to be her neighbor and thanks to her help, I made it so. I asked for very short bios this time. So I'll say Carol Levin, feels so fortunate to have had three full volumes and two chat books published. Her most recent is *An Undercurrent of Jitters*. She is an editorial assistant at Crab Creek Reviews. Welcome, Carol.

00:07:14 **Carol**

Thank you, Peggy. My first poem is... has been published in 2011. It was published in a publication called *Bigger Than They Appear* from Accents Publishing. "History's Juju." In 1944, Edward Teller, pressed the button on the Trinity bomb knowing the atmosphere could catch fire. The fire could circle and in the earth Teller pressed it and waited.

00:08:00 **Carol**

There's a new title for this poem "An Elephant." They knock, they phone, they wheedle neighbors' intimate knowledge. They count their fingers and toes and even add their eyeballs, rolling. calculations of the profusion of profit to be pocketed. When they sell our house with the agility of a hummingbird swoop, I slam in their face. I disconnect. I roar, gushing forth dragon fire at wheeler-dealer real estate, speculators looking to flip thrusting themselves into our lives uninvited. When our cuddling is jolted by the primal Instinct, get your mitts off of our sanctum, my hair stands on end my back arches. I hiss.

00:09:12 **Carol**

"Etiquette Good for Goose is Good for Gander" I chided you for not telling me when green salad curls between my front teeth happened. You compared it to when I said the instructor failed to zip and you gave me an earful for not telling him even though I was sitting front and center, as he faced a roomful of women and men zeroing in on his lecture about how to behave. Doctor. She diagnosed by multiple choice. If you didn't fit box 1, 2, or 3 you died, and it was all your own fault.

00:10:20 **Carol**

Living in my Granny's house. Whenever variegated gray clouds form a vast nubby carpet, I remember the nanny who cared for me, said her convent nuns called this sky, God's sheep out to graze. But she should not have spoken, not about God in Granny's house. With a four-year-old's conviction, I explained the Christian Shephard and his sky sheep grazing as nanny leaned with a firm hand, to polish the Passover Seder plate and Kiddush cup. Her washed out blue eyes, blinked behind her 1940s rimless glasses, one loose strand of sparse, gray hair slipped from the knitted circle of her bun. I ought not to have spoken. I remember her lips pressed thin and blue, silent as usual. The next day, our innocent new nanny was gone.

00:11:45 **Carol**

And this poem I'm going to read was published in Switched on Guttenberg in 2018. "Beyond Question." Everybody I know is older than they used to be, and everyone I know feels old. Though. not everybody is old, just older than before. To them, this is

oldness - many just bloomed compared to me. No, not everybody got old. Now, the question is, do I still know them? What do you call it when they are palpable? When I touch where they touched, smell a fragrance of them, vanilla or smoke or lavender oil, and laugh at what they joked and fumble with them in their gaffes. What do I call cousin Sharon, tying back wild curls, packing floral hippie shifts here last year, taking out what I should wear. And do I still know Mackey who ushered my life into opera and now, only by thinking can I hear the gusto of his baritone laugh, filled the room with rosey warmth. Here they are in the edges, curves, and core of my belly, where they're so young. Where they stay that way.

00:13:40 **Carol**

And this poem is it was published in 2007 by The Pedestal. The title is "Yard Cows." There must be something you can say about your husband as he carves the cow out of a sheet of plywood propped onto saw horses, whinnying laid annoying neighbors. Say, how deeply he bends to the task. Two hands, walking the saber saw around curves, the hooves, up the legs, shaping flanks, following his pencil pattern. The wood outraged from time to time, chatters at the tail and ears, eyes will be painted later. It's the two-dimensional bovine. Whose black spots on white, whose serene illusionary soul will tell something for years about the old codger who sands life's rough spots filling his yard full of plywood cows with udders. Thank you.

00:15:19 **Peggy**

So, she leaves us with an udder, if not an elephant. Thank you. The next reader is Jay Craig, he is by our [unintelligible], he's Jay Craig is a retired Duck captain, whose new obsessions are oil painting and living off grid in his tiny house. Do not ask him about his composting toilet or his succulents. Jay.

00:15:58 **Jay**

Thank you, Peggy. Actually, this will also be a bit of a drinking game for you. So anyway, hello everybody. Happy pandemic. I hope you're all doing well. I've been great. I've taken these last eight months to retire from my job and build an off-grid portable

cabin. And in this time, I've learned how to live in my own home, without a mortgage, in an environmentally friendly way for a few hundred dollars, a month, in Seattle. And I've also come up with some innovations that I think frankly are pretty amazing. I call it a portable cabin instead of a tiny house because it's kind of in between a tiny house and an RV and it lowers the expectations on the bathroom. If not for the pandemic, it might have taken me another two years to finish this thing, but now I'm pretty much done. And that sweet sweet government money is about to run out. So now I have to go get me a job and since nobody is hiring Duck captains, garbage operators, or Metro Bus drivers right now, I figured why not take what I've learned in the last year and see if I can help other people live off grid, in a home that they actually own in the city, for a couple hundred bucks a month, right? So, I started taking pictures and describing how my composting toilet works. See here's the thing. It doesn't require a urine tank. That's the big innovation, right? Every other composting toilet that I've seen, has this urine tank, they have to empty all the time which is disgusting. But urine contains nutrients like nitrogen and potassium, and I dilute it and divert it outside into a flower pot so that there is no odor and I use it to grow succulents.

00:17:38 **Jay**

So I started posting things on my blog. It's a blog that I started back when I was working on the Ballard and Fremont bridges. Is it was something I started so I could write about my bipolar disorder in between bridge openings. I tried to get offmymeds.com because I thought it was funny but it was already taken. So I got backonmymeds.com instead, which was probably smarter since I was responsible for raising and lowering the friggin Ballard Bridge, right? So, but every time I invited a city counselor or somebody from the Bill and Melinda Gates, Foundation, or whoever to go to backonmymeds.com, to check out my bitchin' portable cabin, I got no response. So I started sending people to ScottishBuddhism.com which goes to the same place but still got no response. Nobody took me seriously, and nobody cared about my composting toilet, which by the way also requires virtually no water. Okay, the average person flushes about 30 gallons of perfectly good water down the toilet every day. Right?

00:18:35 Jay

That's over 10,000 gallons a year. Meanwhile, I grow succulents. So I worried a little that people might not want to click on, ScottishBuddhism.com to learn about how to make a composting toilet that doesn't need a urine tank. And at the same time, I won first place in an off-grid Tiny House contest and I asked them to, please call it a portable cabin, and they wouldn't do it. So I bought itsaportablecabin.com! I left out the exclamation point. So now, when you go to, itsaportablecabin.com you can see all about my portable cabin, but you can also read about my cookbook and learn a little bit about the bagpipes that I've made. Now my bagpipes like my composting toilet are vastly underappreciated. Okay, I'm not going to get into all that right now, but I made the most amazing, fully functional [inaudible] Highland bagpipes that are also works of art and they sound perfect. But unfortunately, the only people who would buy my bagpipes are bagpipers and except for a handful of the thousands of bagpipers that have seen my pipes, they've pretty much all slammed them online or made fun of them right to my face and the beer garden of various Scottish festivals. They call me crazy for making them, which really bothered me for a long time. I actually gave away nine of the ten wildest bagpipes ever made to people who probably stuck them in a box and hid them in a closet. And these bagpipes took me over 10 years to figure out. I even got a patent for this carbon fiber chanter. This is the, you know, the part that you [unintelligible] that everybody thought was stupid. I spent thousands of hours making bagpipes that nobody wanted. So as I embark on my campaign to help put people in their own homes, with solar power and composting toilets that don't smell and may or may not be used to grow succulents. I'm not gonna let anybody make me feel like I don't know what I'm doing. They may not appreciate it, but that's their problem, not mine. If being bipolar means you're crazy then fine, I'm crazy, but I get things done.

00:20:35 Jay

So yesterday I pulled out the last bagpipe I ever made and hung it up on the wall of my portable cabin. Because I could just let it sit in a box under my bed or I could pull it out and celebrate just how freaking cool it is. So, at least the elephant, in my room is a beautiful green marble backlight. Thank you. I'm supposed to walk off stage right?

00:20:58 **Peggy**

[Laughter] Yeah. Off stage is good. Thank you so much for so many uses of my favorite word. [Jay] You're very welcome. [Peggy] He has a certain way of saying succulents. It just... I practically swoon. Thank you. I think you're going to have to add this to your YouTube channel. [Jay] All right. Well, thank you, Peggy. [Peggy] Ah, well. Thank you, Jay. Our next reader is Stephen Lundgren, and this is going to be interesting because I can't really see him. So Stephen, he's proving that they're still old school in Ballard. And I'm hoping to be able to show a picture of his Wild Irish Rose. [Stephen] Can you hear me? [Peggy] Oh, there he is. [Stephen] I'm unmuted. Hi-yah star 6. [Peggy] Stephen Lundgren resides with his wife. Sue Anne Marie in West Ballard where he practices poetry. When not working at Harborview Medical Center, helping us all get through these trying times. Nearly Ballard born, he is also a local historian, photographer, musician, painter, and connoisseur of intricate dreams, and plaintive whispers. Welcome Stephan.

00:22:22 **Stephen**

Thank you so much, Peggy. I'm glad to be here. I'm standing in one of several rooms which function as libraries, it's actually a kitchen. But these things do pile up here and I usually bounce my voice off the back of the room, which is only 10 feet away. So, I hope the acoustic works here. Yeah, so I had that cow Carol. It took us two years to get rid of it. And the tiny house in the backyard. I've got a tool shed like that. It's back there somewhere. I should put a toilet in it. So great hearing everybody. It's been a while since I've heard anybody in Ballard because we're all holed up here, but I did see a lot of you walking by my front porch, this summer when I was on a brief vacation, due to the furloughs and pandemics and it's nice to see you all.

00:23:16 **Stephen**

But I'm looking forward to change in it because as you as Peggy mentioned, I work at the county hospital and it's been like being in a war, and I never thought I would be serving on the front lines. Like my father is a medic but there you go, folks, so stay

healthy out there. Okay? So what I've written is kind of in a theme I've fallen into during the pause, which is the last 10 months. But trying to save and retrieve and embellish memories, I did an oral history recently at the National Nordic, which turned out to be a reminiscence on memories of Ballard, as we remembered it, and this is in that same theme. It's about trying to remember things from my life, my wife's life, my family's life and put a little bit of a polish on it or just leave it as the mystery it often is. So this is dedicated to Sue Ann Marie, and it's called "Fog and Mythologies." I want to help you remember the past which briefly shows itself fleeting, in a break in the clouds of miasma. Memory pangs, like the light shafts of flash cameras in darkened rooms.

00:24:42 **Stephen**

Dance halls where couples rotated. Beneath a mirror ball sparkling, the smoke machines on stage. The musicians that played unending rolling, waves of wonders. I take your hand. Lead you to the dance floor, the gold bracelet on your wrist jingling, charms sparkle in the light. That one, the one your mother always wore. In the garden of gold, happy smile of a new bride. Rose bloom at her breast going forth in hopeful chance. After dawn, the ocean murmuring surf tones held a bank of clouds far offshore horizon behind which Polynesian sojourners bore on towards this jeweled Island. Which streams do you remember knowing again on the long winding road to Hana waterfall, drenching your thin silk dress? These instant print photographs have faded into mild [unintelligible] tones. Particularly wear such colors then, brave tops, and golden gowns.

00:25:53 **Stephen**

Somewhere something steady unseen is ticking clicking on counting the milliliters. Oxygen, sucrose, sustenance, surcease, reassuring or terminal. Gargoyles and masks frozen tableau on screens pixels disintegrate upon enlargement mystified the children. Where now, can I touch you, now that we're foreclosed distanced by design? When is the rapture? Our entrance there alone? Dissipate the clouds. Rains disperse the fog. Damp logs on the beaches. Hold the sand for now. Water all around. We drown. These be mythologies. Rest now and thy ruins. Settle in the white dust played on Grecian hillsides. Glisten in the sun. Marble statues remain. Recall us in the rain Waltz step.

[unintelligible] One, two, three, one, two, three, four, five, six, four, five, six. We follow each other carefully and embrace at last. Remembering tender memories together in our room. We are.

00:27:28 Peggy

Thank you, Stephan.

00:27:31 Stephen

Thank you. Kiss for the wife.

00:27:35 Peggy

Yeah, there you go. I had the good fortune to be one of the waivers on his furlough. I'd now like to introduce, Sharon Hennessy. Sharon and I officially met tonight, but I'm sure we've crossed paths many times. It was a delight to meet her and have her join us tonight. Sharon Hennessey is a poet, memoirist, and essay reader. She has an MSW, BA in English literature, and a BA in women's studies from the University of Washington. She's had her work published in The Sicilian... Scillonian (Sorry, I don't know my islands off of Cornwall very well) as well as been the managing editor and sales manager for [unintelligible] and written about LGBTQ health in the Capitol Hill Times in Seattle. Welcome.

00:28:37 Sharon

Thank you. So my poem is called "Smoke and Mirrors" and it's about my experience of caring for my mother in different adult or assisted living facilities as her Alzheimer's progressed. My Alzheimer's mother is not a used car who's fun while she's sparkling new and bright, then loses her appeal as the third stage comes in sight. My mother deserves to shine like a star.

00:29:13 Sharon

My mother is not a used car, whose value for money is high at the start, then rapidly depreciates as her memory falls apart. My mother wants to shine like the Christmas star

in the Assisted Living Lobby. My mother is not a used car who appears enchanting, endearing as she plays with Barbie dolls, but loses her financial value as her cognitive function strays. My mother needs to shine like a star, like the rainbow sequin disco disco blouses she wore. My mother is not a used car, whose love for gardening at first seemed so quaint, then became, quote, a situation. As she opens and leaves, the assisted living gate wide open and quote escapes.

00:30:11 **Sharon**

My mother was dancing and shining like a star she watched in black and white movies as a child. My mother is not a used car. My love for her is all the stars in the sky. She brings oh so much joy to my life. My mother sings and sparkles like the star of my life.

00:30:41 **Sharon**

That's it.

00:30:41 **Peggy**

That's it.

00:30:41 **Sharon**

Short and sweet.

00:30:43 **Peggy**

Oh. Sharon kind of wrestled with light and dark and it gets increasingly hard to go with something entirely light. So thank you for helping to make your mother shine for us.

00:30:57 **Sharon**

Thank you.

00:31:01 **Peggy**

All right, I see no signs of our errant reader who is spending too long at the salon. So Kathy, you are up. So Kathy McMullen, who I did glimpse in person recently spends, (as

she puts it), she spends many hours figuring out beginnings, middles, and endings. You can sample her fiction at Bridge [unintelligible] Gravel and the Maine Review. She blogs at <http://neighborsnorth.wordpress.com> and is currently looking for a home for a novel called *Murdering Clifford Gray*, a novel about a teenage girl who murders her rapist. And she did assure me that tonight she'll be reading a 321 word micro-fiction piece, that is light and uplifting. So....

00:32:11 **Kathy**

Yeah. Okay. Thank you, Peggy. It's nice to see everybody again, okay. This is called "Two White Cranes." Two tiny cranes lie on the flagstones outside the entrance of Suzzallo Reading Room. My breath catches. I rush forward. A moment ago, I was plotting up the curving marble stairs behind a flock of Chinese tourists. I lean in, make out wings, neck, body. A miracle no one has flattened the postage stamp-sized pair under their Nikes. Who took the time to craft them? To crease and uncrease the paper? Who orphaned them on the limestone? Were they made by a child? A lunatic? A knitter run out of yarn? A mathematician lost in a labyrinth theme equation? What made their maker trust that they would not be crushed? Then I decide she is flying to Paris. It slipped her mind until her Uber driver called, she fumbled for her phone, her creations fluttered to the floor. She left the library in a hail of hurried footfalls. The tourists file into the reading room. I scoop up the cranes and settle them in the dry lake bed of my palm. The air rises on the back of my neck. I glance right then left.

00:34:05 **Peggy**

Even now, their maker may look up from her equation. Pause in the counting of her pearls. "Excuse me. But those are mine!" She will say. "Oh no!" I will say, "Finders Keepers." I cradle the foundlings and push through the reading room door. The tourists are craning upward, taking in the hushed rooms, arched, ribbed ceiling, the stained glass windows, the globes suspended from their heavy chains. I glide between the rows of antique oak tables. My table is at the southern tip on the west side. I slide into my chair perch the cranes upon the table lamp's brass pedestal. I imagine their maker, camouflaged behind the books she has removed from a shelf. "Ah! My beauties. My

lovelies." She whispers. "You have found a home." Light pours from the stained glass, as she slips the volume back into place.

00:35:30 **Peggy**

End?

00:35:30 **Kathy**

End.

00:35:30 **Peggy**

[Laughter] Ok. Sometimes, especially with micro-fiction, you have to know, like, so it was like, she slips the volume back into place. Thank you. So glad she was able to join us tonight. I will confess that I think it has something to do with, you know, being in a pandemic, but some people who had hoped to read, we're not able to join us tonight. So, I'm so glad that there are so many of us here. It's wonderful to have you. So, our next reader is Natalie. There we go, gotta find and unmute you. Oh, I always do that. There you go. She's a clear little Zoom efficient [unintelligible]. I don't think I've seen Natalie in person since she did the writer's craft for us at the Library. So Natalie is the author of *California Calling: A Self Interrogation* and has been published in journals, magazines, and newspapers. She has spent the pandemic hunkered, oh excuse me, bunkered (I was supplying the hunkered), bunkered in her Seattle, home with three temporary co-workers, her husband, and two quaran-teens. In her spare time, Natalie works for a large technology company. Welcome.

00:36:53 **Natalie**

Thank you. Hey, I'm gonna read a little essay, titled, (especially for you, Peggy), "The Cello In the Room."

00:37:07 **Natalie**

The notification jolts me out of a work trance, 4:15 p.m. Friday, almost time for my cello lesson. A little wave of dread immediately overtakes me. The kind of wave, I'm sure my

own kids had surfed for years, every time I've asked them: Did you practice your violin? Are you ready for your lesson? You can't learn a new skill if you don't practice. Now I'm the one nervous for the teacher and everyone around me in our oh-so-close pandemic household to realize how much I haven't been practicing, how slow of a learner I really am. Taking up the cello was something I decided to do for myself. I've spent years watching my daughters' learn their instruments. Growing from squeaky preschoolers into beautiful young teen musicians, blending with their peers and orchestral harmony at symphonic concerts and fiddle jam sessions. I love the warm register of the string instruments. I love the anticipation of walking together with my husband up the sloping aisle of a darkened theater, enveloped in the wood smell of auditorium seating to hear some amateur Bach or bluegrass. A pair of napkin wrapped, PTA, bake sale cookies, waiting in my purse. Then Covid came. Concerts, along with so many things, went on hiatus. My family crammed into the house for a new kind of work and school day. The usual outlets for fun and adventure are all but disappeared. Suddenly, amid this stressful upheaval, I started thinking about the low rich sounds of the cello. Almost magically, an email came from our middle school with home music resources, including the contact of a private cello teacher. Should I try it? I usually pick up new things fast, I told myself. I emailed Bradley, who said he'd be happy to take on a beginning adult student via video meetings. I don't know if I was quite as transparent with Bradley as I should have been about my beginner status. Not only could I not play the cello but I also couldn't read music. Somehow, I had stumbled through two years of high school playing the clarinet, but either I never really learned to properly read or all the knowledge had since escaped me.

00:39:41 **Natalie**

Now, I found myself trying to fall asleep at night memorizing staff lines and spaces and the diatonic scale. The letters were like fireflies, blinking in and out. A, D, G, C, hovering in my consciousness before, escaping my reach, just as I tried to grasp them. At the end of each week, I tried to set aside, the stressors and responsibilities of remote work in quaran-teens and set up for my lesson with Bradley. Computer balanced on an eight inch, thick book of, Shakespeare that no one ever reads, cello and [unintelligible] out,

instrument hugged between my knees, right fingers already stiff from the bow I didn't practice holding nearly as frequently as I should. Bradley patiently walked me through the tiny songs of Suzuki Book One. 5-year-olds were better at this than I was, I soon realized. When Bradley asked, if I would play in an online recital because other students in May, I demured, even though I knew all skill levels were welcome. Next time, I said.

00:40:50 **Natalie**

When another recital rolled around in August, again I deferred. I scratched my way along. Promising myself I'd practice more and improve quickly. Each week confronting the truth of being terrible. I'm used to pushing fast through unfamiliar territory. I love building mastery in other areas. I wanted to do that with music too. I've tried to shut down the annoying voice in my head. Oh, look a mom who's trying to learn her kids' hobby, but she's too slow. You can't teach an old dog new tricks. Some people will never be musical. It's been nine months since I started the cello. I practice when I can, but not when I should. I've made it through most of Suzuki Book One, but I've been stuck on the last, hardest, three songs for the past 12 weeks with no sign of improvement. "Happy Farmer" is for me, so not happy. These things called slurs, a sequence of two or more notes to be played without pause with the bow continuing in the same direction, these amount to cruel and unusual punishment. My brain wants to obey, but half the time my bow hand does its own thing. Just feel the music, Bradley tells me. I laugh. It sounds so easy, dude, but it's not. Most of the time, I think the cello plays me and not the other way around. I recently discovered that I will practice more if my cello is already setup, not hiding away in its cumbersome case. So I cleared a large space, one of the few left in our now crowded house, and bought a sturdy stand which holds my rented cello upright in all its glory, the central figure in the room, a beacon of hope, or at least my most irrational ambitions.

00:42:44 **Natalie**

At my recent lesson, I settle into the cello room, take a deep focusing breath and remind myself to set aside the guilt of not practicing and the frustration of slow progress in order to embrace the joy of learning. I concentrate on the feel of the varnished wood of this

magnificent instrument in my hands. We tackle the goddamn slurs yet again. Breaking down one single task into multiple steps, repeating it over and over and over until finally a few times in a row, I get it. Over Zoom, Bradley smiles and jokes and acts like my every micro success is an accomplishment and maybe it is. The end.

00:43:34 **Peggy**

Thank you so much. I confess that having seen a little bit of the bow work of your daughters, I assumed we were talking about you having to live with, you know, constant cello practice. So Bravo that it's you.

00:43:52 **Peggy**

How many of us have decided to take on a whole new skill during quarantine? Okay, you're thinking [laughter]. So glad you could join us. Okay, now this is the end with... oh! Karen is showing up. I'm gonna let her in. She was our other errant [unintelligible] reader. Let's give her a second.

00:44:25 **Karen**

Hi. Sorry, I'm late.

00:44:27 **Peggy**

[Unintelligible] her hair everybody. Now we know where she's been.

00:44:34 **Karen**

It's true.

00:44:34 **Peggy**

Yeah, I don't know what you saw, but we had to skip you and the reader before you now had just ended, so your timing is exquisite.

00:44:45 **Karen**

Wow.

00:44:47 **Peggy**

Are you ready?

00:44:49 **Karen**

I'm sorry to miss everyone, and I'm glad to see everybody's names and thank you for showing your faces, those of you who are.

00:44:55 **Peggy**

Yeah. Well, but now, you ready for me to introduce you and read?

00:44:59 **Karen**

Yes, please.

00:45:00 **Peggy**

Okay. So Karen Gamble, did not send me her bio, probably because she's the class director at Ballard Health Club and has been leading a free cardio workout up to six mornings a week at 8 a.m. since mid-March. She is also a writer, world traveler, and extraordinary yoga teacher. And her hair looks fabulous.

00:45:25 **Karen**

I love you. Thank you.

00:45:26 **Peggy**

Wait, where's Sophie?

00:45:27 **Peggy**

Ah, Sopia Junebug? She's by the heater. She'll be okay.

00:45:33 **Peggy**

Oh, I wanted her in your arms.

00:45:33 **Peggy**

We don't need Sophie for this week.

00:45:36 **Peggy**

Yeah. I'm, I'm the curator here. I got to make a request. Okay.

00:45:45 **Karen**

Hopefully she'll make this all good to go. This is Sophie Junebug, the nicest dog in the world. All right, so this is "Elephant In the Room." And I'm reading off of my iPad, so bear with me.

00:45:58 **Karen**

When asked to write about the elephant in the room, I thought to myself well, which one? And then I thought, yeah, which elephant and what room? Are we in this room together? Is this an elephant we share? Do we go down the list or let's call it, the fucking 2020 list. Institutionalized racism. Me too needing a rerun. The rich are so rich and homelessness is exponentially rising. Global warming. Russian spies. Q-Anon and voter fraud stories running amok. Covid conspiracy theories. I love Dr. Fauci. Can't they just leave him out of it? Or is it my room? The lonely elephant that sits on my couch during Covid lockdown? Or the elephant under the kitchen sink filling up my recycling bin with empty wine bottles? Or maybe it's the elephant in the bedroom, swiping left and left again because they all look so damn old. I have often wondered about elephants in the room. Why do we never say whatever we think is the obvious truth out loud. Why do we let pass golden opportunities to actually engage in something real?

00:47:14 **Karen**

Maybe if we let ourselves be a little uncomfortable, we might confront the hidden privileges that are plaguing the fortunate right now. Maybe if we just said what we thought to one another, instead of answers, we would have more questions and those questions could lead to better understanding and hopefully solutions to real problems.

And since it's just me talking to myself these days, these are some of my questions: Karen, why don't you get off the couch and call someone? Karen, would you like to put that glass down and go for a walk? Karen, do you really think you want to meet someone during the pandemic. And importantly, Karen, do you understand that your dog isn't the one that suffers separation anxiety, it's you? Sometimes, I drink too much. It comes from social anxiety, which is a good reason not to drink alone. I'm better company when sober. I'm single, because I want to be. I haven't met anyone yet, who can light up my heart, let alone a room.

00:48:19 Karen

Which is what I'd like him to do whenever he walks in through my door. My dog is my best friend for the time being. I think our collective elephants have gotten so big, we no longer see them as having entered the room. They take up so much space, we're practically sitting on their laps. Why haven't we equal representation in our government? Why are we so mad about immigrants taking jobs we don't want to do? America, please tell me how many women have to die at the hands of someone they know before we realize it's systemic beliefs that create this violence. And not just violence against women, but people of color and also, LGBTQ and trans people. When will we realize that a blind eye is just as abhorrent as condoning the violence? Why can't we find solutions to homelessness? We have the time to rethink how we approach life when we return to it. I think if we ask our elephant those questions, they would answer. It's not too late to do better as a country. We can end racism. We can value women equally with men. We can value all humans like we do rich white men, who no matter how they identify themselves. The rich are too rich and the poor are too poor. We need to care better for those that need help. It's time we stop applying Band-Aids, and look at the systems, social economic cultural and familial norms that keep us hurting one another, whether from word or deed. To end homelessness, you have to value people. Let's start there. And here I am back to my elephant and where I need to start. If I'm going to be able to tackle that collective elephant with you. I have to value myself. I have to love myself enough to ask the tough questions and be forgiving when I don't like the answers. Because, that's how we make changes. Not by giving answers by asking

questions and living. So I ask you, what do you want normal to look like when you get back to it? That was it.

00:50:25 **Karen**

Thank you. Okay. Show the dog. The most important person in your life.

00:50:35 **Karen**

She's in love with the heater right now.

00:50:39 **Peggy**

Now when Karen had me, read her, piece ahead of time, I thought it seemed so dark. But, when she delivers it with like a smile, it's like it makes everything seem more possible even in the darkest of times. So, I'm so glad you made it back in time.

00:50:54 **Karen**

I thank you. Thank you, thank you.

00:50:57 **Karen**

So I'd now like to open up our event in case anybody would like to do open mic. Give me a little wave. I can look back and see around. Let's close screen. So, this has been lovely. I once again, would counsel you to like, you know, order a pie. Even if you don't need it, you can secretly leave it on a neighbor's doorstep, and it will really surprise them like my, my letter carriers leaving me. goodies this morning. I'm such a lucky person, I had to kind of run through a whole grouping in my head of you know, who could have left me something, you know, treats this morning. So now you are allowed to kind of mingle as though we were in the Ballard Library, and so if somebody wants to ask Jay about his succulents, or if somebody wants to, you know, say how can I help you get, you know, the Clifford Gray, you know, novel published. Where can I start, you know.... Can I meet Bradley and start taking the cello? Now is your time that you are allowed to unmute and, and mingle without the need to put up the library chairs. I hope you'll all come back again. Stay in touch, invite your friends, and January we'll be



hosting the African American Writers Alliance, which is always a treat. And boy, are they glad not to have to drive up from Columbia City. Traffic was always murder when they had to come in person. So, I look forward to seeing you either on Zoom or in person as we start the next full year of our It's About Time Writers reading program and look for the YouTube and the future podcasts.

