



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #385

00:00:02 Peggy Sturdivant

Welcome to... I have to check my files... reading number 385 of the It's About Time Writers Reading Series. I'm very happy to have you here this evening for a non-snowy, clear roads. We wouldn't have had any trouble getting here. Even if we had been in person. Unfortunately, Millicent has had to cancel tonight. We had hoped to have Millicent Jorge Zaccardi, along with Pamela Hobart Carter and Eleanor Devito-Owen. Millicent, I hope we'll be able to reschedule at a later date. Tonight then we'll be hearing from Pamela Hobart Carter and Eleanor Devito Owen, who has just joined us, and I'm happy to already have three names on my open mic, three-minute reading opportunity. First, I'd like to welcome Pamela. Pamela Hobart Carter is the author of "Her Imaginary Museum" and "Held Together with Tape and Glue" Slapering Hol Press Chapbook Competition finalist and pushcart prize nominee. Carter is co-author with Arlene Williams of twelve short books in Easy English for Adults. Her plays have been read and produced in Montreal, where she grew up, and Seattle, where she lives, and Fort Worth, where she has only visited. Then for more than three decades, Carter was a teacher. Please welcome Pamela.

00:01:42 Pamela Hobart Carter

Hi, everybody. Thanks. Thanks so much for having me. I will start with a poem that was inspired by the paintings of Joan Kirkman, and they were on display at the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner, Washington. This is called Mother Color. And it's after Ursula K Le Guin. And I actually did it go one-for-one replacement of her words and the verb for verb noun for noun etcetera, and kept the shape as best I could of her poem.

00:02:27 Pamela Hobart Carter

Mother Color. Mother color, omnipresent, multitudinous, desk canting across canvases in up swelling umbers, ambers, ocras, Roar of Iris indigos, mimic of Kandinsky pinks and greens, enchantment of Chartres bruises, and minor scales of Royal Blues surround us, synchronize us with your immeasurable emissions to hum, to hear, to harmonize, to respect all prisms in our eyes.

00:03:12 Pamela Hobart Carter

This is a another color related poem. And these are in Her Imaginary Museum. Unicorn, Gumball Machine. She eyes the red ball, her eye an ebony orb, bigger than the shiny gumball. Its neighbors, blue, green, violet, and yellow spheres gleam inside the clear glass tank like giant grains of aquarium sand, lustrous. The coin pinched between her square teeth, drops into the slot and her ivory horn

prods the release of the round rainbow envoy. Glee spreads over her horsey face, as the hard globe's rattle, beads on a psychedelic rosary, and her polychrome prayers and her whinny are answered when a single plop and clattering roll signal her wished for gift has slid into the shoot for her chomping enjoyment. The Unicorn extracts with her soft gray lips, the red gumball. Isn't this, as we would all desire, that the small worlds we eye and Inspire into ephemeral existence at our leisure as we canter, deeper and deeper into wild dark forests.

00:04:48 Pamela Hobart Carter

A number of my poems in this chapbook are inspired by real works of art, but some of them are about works of art that I made up. And this is one of these. Blink. How does anyone believe the artist who says her painting will kill those who glance without effort at its surface? But guards keep their backs to the work, all shift, and those who purchase tickets sign waivers. Without a death, the Opus travels three sites. Critics ask, if threatened might viewers last if artists their do? Is the painting a boon to more than its venues? Is no blinking the fugu of visual art? While the painting reminds the director of a certain annoying childhood game, he prohibits minors' entry to the exhibit. No blinking may never be in private hands. Owners forget to value their goods, and their babies cannot know to avert their curious, tiny eyes. The postcards safe to glimpse, bore everyone. Without its menace, the staring face is a simple bully with a single skill. Plus, the brushwork is clumsy, the figure unconvincing. The painting, a young girl sees, is itself a bully. Dismissed? A fraud? Worse? A bully herself? A gimmicker? A gym cracker? The artist takes a cigarette lighter to no blinking. Although quick to spray flame suffocating foam, the noble guard is too slow to stop her. The painting burns to ash. The artist adopts an alias moves to another country and cultivates wine grapes that cannot mind being told what to do. To admit mistakes overwhelms some of us. We must torch everything. Start again.

00:07:17 Pamela Hobart Carter

This poem is also inspired by an artwork. It's inspired by a photograph by someone that I've only met through social media. And he lives in London. His name is Robert Reynard, and he and I have now got this very enjoyable conversation going back and forth across the continents and the ocean of his photographs in my poems. This is the first poem that I read based on one of his photographs and his photograph I used. I'm hoping that this shows, okay, I used his photograph in this collage that's on the cover of Held Together with Tape and Glue. And and some of the poems in here are collages. So I hope that that was appropriate too. But this is this is Flight Over a Quiet Square, inspired by a photograph by Robert Reynard. When a bird flies toward you, and you raise your lens, you can't be sure the solar angle or the contrast between its white plumage and the shaded verticals of formal colonnades and fancy fenestration behind it will show to the advantage you imagine. You frame strong sun, painting feathers bright through the gull's fanned tail and wing edge. The Flying form at an active, banking angle about to alight on pale gray pavers, discreetly delineated foreground. We dream of flight, of riding sky, of letting a wind hold us aloft, landing as easily here as on a rooftop.

00:09:17 Pamela Hobart Carter

This is one of my collage poems in here. And I've I've been following the advice of Jericho Brown. He was saying, if you write a lot of poems that you may not be that fond of in their totality, there's got to be like a line here and there that you do like. And you can extract and paste together in other ways.

And this is one of those pasting together. Occasion. On occasion, the threat is real, and you have seen it. Nerve endings are many and astute. Perhaps you understand. Tragedy is school from every source. Not the sight of blood, but it's scent and taste draw the shark. As obediently undertaken as an assignment, as a suspension of ordinary time, carry your blaze always to undo acts of evil men. Share an unworldly weight of sunrays in these woods. Follow the unfamiliar drums when the maple turns. See the pale gibbous glow. Most miss the mid-morning moon, the whole ocean of dreamed life.

00:10:44 Pamela Hobart Carter

I wrote a series of poems earlier in the year that connect the similarity in appearance of the brain and the universe. And this is from that group of poems. At the center of your eye is a black hole. At the center of your eye and mine is an opening that looks like a perfect round, an aperture through to soul, to a surface crowded with sensors. We are sensitive, sensory beings. You see into me through my pupil. The daystar cinches it for our safety. Too much staring blinds. At so many exact cores lie blank spots we mistake for emptiness. That poem got some help from Ben Klein who calls himself the poet whisperer. And he made some excellent suggestions. He's the author of dead uncles and Sagittarius A asterisk. And I highly recommend his poetry. Of One Mind. This is another from that series. Of One Mind. He said, we agree about everything. How grass and pelicans, Saturn and its satellites comprised like stuff of a perfect Oneness. She said, we agree about nothing. How even Gulfs and gaps vacuums and voids experience gravity and pulses. He said, we sink forever in our thinking and will in Infinity be simpatico. I love each atom of your face, and you love mine each month replaced. She said, our every step is Instinct. This breath, that gulp, those sneezes. I love each atom of deep space, and it loves Mine. The Interchange. This poem is also inspired by one of Robert Reynard, my London friends' photographs and its title is from his caption for it. Oh, and I should say, a little about Robert is that I met him, because we're both on an art history site on Facebook, and he worked at the Tate Museum and would post photographs of artworks there until covid came along. And then he wasn't at the Tate, taking those photographs, and instead was out and about in London on his bicycle, Etc. And taking his own photographs of scenes around town and an in his apartment and so forth. And or, as he would say, in his flat, this is, Life Goes On, inspired by a photograph by Robert Reynard. In this rain filled season any resemblance between our black-and-white Thursdays and this persistent world is deliberate. The view this means of present and future reaches through some sharp and broken translucence. What secures these fragments like glass shards, much holds together invisibly in a circular frame. Every character location and event is purely accurate. This life is not a work of fiction.

00:14:39 Pamela Hobart Carter

This poem is in honor of the season, and I'll tell you what I was doing with it at the far end. It's called Solstice Crow. And I wrote it for my friend Paul Mullen. On our downward voyage through ebony hours, you love to count seconds crossed off solar smolder, adore shouting before stroke of solstice. Hope crowds join you to note momentousness of orbital motifs, longest or shortest, most most most. Fathoming only cold gloom or profound loss, forgetful of coming solid luminosity, once of protracted yellow. Forgetful of our rotational rondo or seasonally disordered. Others drown below low color atmospheres. Eons ago you vowed to horn blow upon those moments of shortest solar showing. Now your song jogs lost memory of cosmic knowledge. On Solstice obscurity comes to ground. Journeys

aloft closely follow journeys down into shadowy coal. Solar glow grows post-Solstice. Orbs bounce, old souls drop into tombs. Caramel Reborn. Solstice Crow, you forge reason to rejoice. I gave myself a rule for that one that every word would have an o in it. And it took me a long time to put those together. But when I found it. So, so all the all the words in here have oohs. And I also wanted to just sort of show you the shape to. It's a bit of a concrete poem. This is to be my last. This is Latitudes, and it's an erasure from How to Keep Bees by Anna Comstock. It's a 1905 book, and it's a beautiful. It's a beautiful work about beekeeping. And it was really fun to create these erasures from it. I'm going to tell you what this word means, because I had to look it up, but I really wanted to include it in the poem, which was scantling's that are like little chalk blocks to raise something. And many of you may know, but I didn't. Latitudes. In Northern latitudes, we think we know cold dampness, Frost and chill. It is safer to Winter if honey is good and enough. If honey be given. We never winter without 30 pounds of honey, we have given honey. In Winter it is necessary that honey passed through the city, a devotion of honey. In preparing for winter, we protect in every diameter, the spaces between dried leaves. Many words are said, for this method of wintering, it is a guard against extremes and sudden changes. Warm fine, a cushion like covering with boughs of evergreen. Our losses arrested, our scantling's in place. Thank you.

00:18:34 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you so much. That was such a... there was such a warmth in the poems, you know, with your Solstice Crow ending with the word Rejoice. So it makes me feel warmer as we head into a winter weekend. And also now picture, I love the the collage. And I know picture not only little scraps of paper on your floor, but is there a word for like eraser crumbs, you know, as a beautiful Erasure poem. Thank you so much. Our next Open Mic. Well, our first open mic reader tonight is Kevin O'Connor.

00:19:19 Kevin O'Connor

This is this is a poem about stumbling about, and I have to preface it with a mention of a specific song lyric, because I refer to it in the poem if any of you, well, even if you're not familiar with the song Christmas Wrapping by The Waitresses, I make a reference to the line. Suddenly, we laughed and laughed caught on to what was happening. This poem is called bad form. She didn't know whether to be churlish or girlish. He didn't know what churlish meant, so that really put them in a bind, because, of course, he was going to be no help whatsoever. Then that line from Christmas Wrapping by The Waitresses. So I can publish this without getting in trouble for copyright infringement, but with puzzled looks and uneasy silence instead of a magical moment of mutual realization, because when you can't find what you're looking for, so you can get the words out the way they came to you, everything goes off by significant degrees. And you have to resort to explaining the hazards of trying to retain a thought long enough to write it down without being distracted by obstacles, great and small, and what that effort does to the entire venture, i.e. what was supposed to be a whimsical piece of surrealist poetry is now just as awkward as our protagonists were when we left them. And I have two toes that are going to have bruises on them tomorrow morning. Thank you.

00:20:57 Peggy Sturdivant

Thank you, Kevin. Good to see you again, we're going to do one more Open Mic before we hear from Eleanor. And I also just want to say a quick hello. So a quick hello to some of people who I haven't met, but who I'm excited are attending tonight and are going to be reading in 2022, including on Ana Dalin, G G Silverman, and as I mentioned, Ruth Chemel, who will be joining us in January. Sylvia,

00:21:31 Sylvia

Right. This is an autumn poem, and it's called Ghosts of Green. These mid-november dusts are ghosts, Souls of leaves ripped by time and torn along incision lines. They twirled and fell piled dull and dying, heaped along the curb, waiting to be burned. They're ghosts whirled wildly, mood fierce autumn storms. So much leave breaking. Farewells to Summers dreams, some turn bright red or orange, drop early. While other leaves hang on, no longer vibrant, lingering until their turn to enter Winters crypt. The weather offers commentary. Clouds rage, sing dirges, leap, some makes cameo appearances in stands of tall pines. And I have a silly little [inaudible] one if you'd like that too. And here it is. Now, this is this is something I wrote when I was in Middle School this summer. And there's a nearby town called Morton... Mineral itself is about three people in one street, but Morton has several streets and more people than any actually had to go through [inaudible]. And in the spring, I took the surrealism workshop with Susan Rich and telling. Also I get on. And so this is kind of came out of that. It's called She Rides in to Morton. She rides into town in an antique gold Chariot, drawn by a mismatched pair of hippocampi, yielding the drafting tools and painting shoes. Spinning her fortunate wheels, she careens down Main Street, wears only her smile and a sari hand-printed with carrots, karobs, Apple Cores, cigarette cases, leftovers from feeding zealots at the zoo. Clock striking ours, not theirs in the chamber of lopsided jukeboxes, too early for ampersands or pomegranates, so she orders the saddle shoes with broad laces, starfish sundae for dessert.

00:24:09 Peggy Sturdivant

Never too early for ampersands, in my opinion. Thank you so much, Sylvia. Thanks for all of our open mic readers jumping in tonight. So I now like to introduce Eleanor Devito Owen. Eleanor Devito Owen is a centenarian whose short memoir, Hobo Soup, earned a first place award in this year's Pacific Northwest Writers Association contest. Oh, and a co-founder of the National Alliance on Mental Illness is a lifelong educator and advocate for individuals with major mental illness and their families. In her early life, she lived in New York City and designed costumes for modern dancers. After settling in Seattle with her husband and two children, she taught preschoolers in creative drama in Seattle Public Libraries. She gained her MA from the UW and taught at Lakeside School and the UW School of drama. Her Hobo Soup award is a chapter in her memoir, From the Gone Room, about growing up in a chaotic Italian immigrant family during prohibition and the Great Depression. Welcome.

00:25:21 Eleanor Devito Owen

It was 1931 two years after Wall Street crashed and papa lost everything. The Brownstone house, the big steam shovel, his trucking business, and our family moved from Brooklyn to our former vacation home in the farm country of Upstate New York. After supper we kids lounged on the grass that covered the crest of our steep lawn, nudging for cool spots, which had been shaded during the day. Francie, thirteen and the oldest of my seven siblings, started his game of counting hobos. 29 he said not to be outdone, Albert, 12, yelled 35. Then we girls joined in shouting different numbers. The point

of the game was to guess how many hobos would walk past the far end of our grape vineyard before one stopped his pace, stared at our big barn, then stopped and examined the wood post that held up our mailbox. We seldom kept score. Some nights we would count 40 to 50 men, each walking slowly, always alone, head bowed, searching the ground. I marveled at their clothes. Even in the hot summer weather, they wore winter hats, mostly brown and herringbone, caps were soft, smooth fedoras. Many had woolen overcoats tied around their waists, sleeves knotted together across their bellies. Some carried an extra pair of shoes with laces tied to their belts. When a hobo stopped at the mailbox, he would lift his hat and swipe it across his forehead before kneeling to read the symbol carved into the post, we learned that seasoned hobos knew that posts that lined America's country highways informed other hobos which houses would welcome them, and which wouldn't. The carvings on our mailbox post showed two ovals, symbols for potatoes. The stingy Shadow's post had a large x, which meant nothing here. The Filacello's post, with the circle around the X meant pie. The Marcos had a crude, menacing dog's face on thiers, notifying beware. And the Pelosis had a hoe; you might get a meal in exchange for work. Near nightfall a man stopped and checked our post. If a man stopped and checked our post, he'd always snag a few fresh weeds, tuck them at the base of the post and hold them in place with a heavy rock before turning into the long driveway that led up the hill to our house. This was the hobos way of telling anyone else who stopped, this barn has been asked for. When hobos came to our back door, they always did two things. First, they removed their hats, and then they stared non-stop at the bushel basket of potatoes that sat on the corner of the back vestibule to our kitchen. Next they would ask if they could sleep in the barn. Mama would size each one up before she spoke. If the hobo was young, she acted like his mother and made him promise not to smoke in the barn. With older men, she was more authoritarian. If you smoke, you cannot sleep in the barn. She would hold each man's gaze with a look that told them she knew he smoked and he better not tell her otherwise. These men were quick to confess yes, they smoked, but knew enough to smoke in the pasture. Some, eager to gain her approval, or desperate for the potatoes would elaborate on how much they knew about the dangers of smoking near hay. Once reassured mama would reach into the basket and hand the hobo two raw potatoes. My older brothers and I would often watch from a distance, peeking from behind trees to see how they prepare their meals. Some hobos found a quiet spot under the hickory tree in the cow pasture. Others build a fire too close to the barn for mama's liking; some picked a spot out in the open. I ranked the hobos according to their table manners. Mama and Papa considered good table manners important, especially out in public. And papa frequently reminded us good manners are just as important as speaking without an Italian accent if you're going to be Supreme Court judges. Some hobos washed the potatoes at the pump before they cook them, a few just rub them on their trousers. Others peel the potatoes and threw the skins under the hedge before putting a rest in the old tin coffee can. Most didn't peel the potatoes, just

00:31:06 Eleanor Devito Owens

cut them up zigzag or in circles. A few carefully peeled the potato skins into long curls, and added them later. I figured these men were making themselves a two course meal, although we obeyed Mama's Mantra, never talk to a stranger and don't ever let anyone touch you. We spy and learn how to make hobo soup. First, salvage a tin coffee can, poke two holes opposite each other near the top rim (Francie did this), then fold a wire clothes hanger in half and been the loop ends through the holes. Finding a wire coat hanger was my job. Next locate three strong saplings tie them together at

the top with a few strands of tough dandelion stems or handful of fresh, long weeds, or as some hobos did, twist and snap off a section of the wire clothes hanger and wrap it around the top of the saplings and snug this tripod into the ground. For our hobo soup, we searched the sunny side of the pasture for several dry cow plops, largest pieces. Mimicking the hobos, we placed the props over flat field stones and set them on fire. I loved the way the sweet, smoky scent of hay stayed in my hair for hours. Last we fill the coffee can with water from the pump near the dining room bay window and boiled our two potatoes without cutting them up. Unlike the hobos, we usually grew impatient and turn to other pranks. Mama would yell for us to feed the half cooked potatoes to the chickens. Hobos, unlike us, took their time. While their soup simmered they groomed themselves, using an assortment of utensils they carried: spoons, forks, pocket knives . From inside their breast pockets, some removed collapsible cups either tin or celluloid. A shiny Tin Cup could be propped up between small branches of the apple tree and its round-bottom acted like a tiny mirror. After moistening their fingers in the soup water, the men slathered their faces with bits of soap taken from one of their pockets and skillfully wielded their knives or razor blades and shaved. Every hobo's face gleamed pink and clean shaven before he sat down to eat his only meal of the day. Sometimes the men removed their shirts, shook them hard and put them back on. Other times before or after they ate, they washed them in the rain barrel alongside the barn, wrung them tight and stretch them across the hedge, or over the large currant bushes to dry before morning. When the potatoes were done, some hobos remove their caps and use them as potholders to grab the hot wire hanger and carry the can over to one of the trees. Before sitting down, a spoon would emerge like magic from a side pocket or a back pocket. The men settle down with their back against the trunk, put the can between their legs and slowly spoon the potatoes out of the can. Some drank the soup from the collapsible cups they dipped into the broth. While others lingered over their meals and stayed close to the makeshift fire, either stoking it absent-mindedly, or putting out the flames and spreading the ashes. A few took out small books or creased newspapers from inside their shirtsleeves and read until dark. Many carry drawstring pouches filled with loose tobacco, which they shook into rectangles of white tissue paper. After pulling the drawstring tight with their teeth and letting the pouch fall into their laps, they would lick the glue edge of the delicate paper and rolled it into a cigarette. Often as we snuggled two or three to a bed, the faint tune of a sad song played on a harmonica would put us kids to sleep. Although the men each dress differently, some carried heavy winter jackets throughout summer, others wore several layers of checkered flannel shirts. And two pairs of pants, man was bone thin and shared the same confused and melancholy look. Mama once guessed that a large grown hobo over 6 feet tall must have weighed less than Francie, who weighed 80 pounds. She gave him an extra potato. Many spoke with unfamiliar accents. They would rest their stooped bodies against trees in the pasture, or lean against the barn door, their eyes roving as if to study their environment for the night. But reading their eyes and faces, I knew they imagined some place far, far away. Home. One weekday I was alone in the house. It was early evening. Aunt Tessie, who mama had taught to drive, took my four younger sisters and baby Charlie to the new ice cream parlor. My mother and my older brothers went to the peach orchard to check if the crop had ripened enough for picking. I stayed home in case Papa phoned from Brooklyn. Being home alone and waiting for a phone call was one of my favorite chores. We had a party line, and although mama has forbidden us to answer when it wasn't our number, one long and two short rings, I took secret delight in disobeying. Instead, perfecting my skill. I would slowly lift the earpiece from its hook and listen in on neighbors' gossip. This particular evening I

watched from inside the open dining room window as a hobo, who mama had given two potatoes to, approached the house. He carried a coffee can to the pump. He was very tall, much taller than my father and all my stocky Italian uncles, and he was very thin. His trousers were tucked into folds at the sides and across his back. I wondered if factories made pants in only one size for very tall men. The hobo held a can under the spout with his left hand, and pumped the handle up and down two or three times with his right, then stopped. He seemed puzzled when no water gushed from the clogged spout. Moving towards the window, I said, you have to pump 11 times. Our well is very deep. I imitated Papa who like to boast about having the deepest well with a clearest water than any Farm in the area. The hobo started to pump again and without pausing, asked, does your mother have any salt? My mother isn't home, but you can come in and get some from the shelf above the kitchen stove. Its too high for me to reach. The hobo stopped pumping, stared at the coffee can for a few moments, then loosened his grip on the pump handle and watched it slowly drop. He sat the coffee can down and walked toward the open window. As he approached, he reminded me of my mother's stories of George, her suiter in Italy. She told us girls, George came from Tuscany, where everyone is fair haired with eyes blue as the sky. But he broke his promise. He didn't follow me to Ellis Island when I left [inaudible]. The hobo's beautiful blue eyes searched mine. He held my gaze with a strange look. Leaning on the windowsill close enough to touch me, he asked, are you alone? Yes. Do you know where your mother went? To the peach orchard to see if the peaches are ripe enough to pit. Will she be long? I don't know. We both stood still and stared at each other. And last he broke the silence. How old are you? Nine and a half. His eyes searched mine. He came closer and his voice, soft and low, asked my name. Eleanor. He clears his throat. Eleanor in Minnesota, I have a little girl who's about your age. Her name is Ingrid. When I lived at home, I taught her that she must never never, never ask a stranger into the house. Never. Especially if a mother is not at home. He sounded so kind. I thought this hobo would never ever break a promise. When Mama and the boys came home from the orchard, I told her about the salt and what the hobo has said. Mama's dark eyes lost their gleam. They turned into black woolen buttons, the way they did whenever something disturbed her or mattered a lot. She seemed to be reasoning inside herself beside the dark wool. Biting into the side of her lower lip, she moved across the kitchen. She tore a thin sheet of paper from the Sears catalog we kept near the cast-iron stove for kindling, then reached into the salt bowl and dropped a small handful into the paper. Folded it shut and called to Francie. Take this to the hobo. As Francie started out the kitchen door, she stopped him. Wait. Mama lifted the lid from the simmering pasta sauce, laid out three warm meatballs, wrapped them in a large lettuce leaf and handed them to Francie. As he headed out the door, she said, ask the hobo to stop by the back door in the morning. After Francie left, I asked why the hobo wasn't home with his daughter. Mama paused and slid the sauce to the back of the stove. Maybe his family is living with his wife's mother. More to herself than to me, she added, he's ashamed. He has no job, he can't support them. He's one less mouth to feed. The next morning, while we finished our oatmeal, we heard the hobo pumping water and rinsing the coffee can. Mama went outside and spoke to him. I talked to my husband, who will be here on the weekend. He said, if you want work, you could help out in the orchard until all the peaches are picked. It might be for a week or two. She paused held his gaze. It's a dollar a day. The hobo didn't stir. He looked at the ground, then reached his long thin arm around his back, reached under his belt, and removed his flattened, pie-shaped Fedora. He took a long time to answer. We kids had followed Mama outside and formed a semi-circle around him. We watched in silence as he unfolded the hat,

smoothed it open, creased it, and then lowered it across his chest. I'd be much obliged. Then, fixing his eyes so they met Mama straight on almost tumbling over the words he said. Would it be possible to get paid a little something on the first day? I puzzled. A little something? A dime? A quarter? Mama didn't seem puzzled. She nodded her head. I'll have a dollar ready for you at the end of the day. Her tone sounded soft and gentle, seeming to imply she understood why he took so long to answer. They smiled at each other, like old friends. She turned to Francie and told him to show the hobo where the empty wooden pecks were stacked, and to take him to the peach orchard. The following morning before the hobo went to the orchard, I saw him put a letter in the mailbox and lift the red metal flag, alerting the post man to check inside. After the hobo had crossed Highway 99 W and disappeared in the peach orchard. I ran down to the mailbox, peeked inside and saw an envelope with dark creases, outlining where had been folded. It was addressed to Ingrid Clark, care of [inaudible] Stillwater, Minnesota. A shiny red 2 cent stamp, decorated the top on the right. On the left our address, Sunny Ridge Fruit Farm, Middle Hope, New York. Drawn on the back of the envelope were four hearts inside the largest he had written Ingrid and gradually smaller and smaller hearts living Ingrid the Yens and Eric. That night, sitting around the dining room table, I supervised a new project. We cut wrinkled brown paper sacks/bags and folded them into envelopes, gluing the sides together with homemade flour and water paste. On the front right-hand corners we drew stamps with red crayon and wrote 2 cents inside squares and mailed them to imaginary people, schoolmates or each other. I address my to Tia Marietta, Mama's sister in Italy whom we had never met. Mildred addressed hers to George in [inaudible] Italy. Albert addressed his to the boss, Sing Sing Prison. Well into the first week, as Mama gave the hobo his day's pay, she said, you must be a teacher. You speak such good English. Always striving to perfect her speech, Mama paid special attention to how people spoke. Like Papa, she believed good English was important. She often boasted about having enrolled in night school within three months of landing on Ellis Island. But this was one of the times Mama guessed wrong. He wasn't a teacher. He said he kept books. I wondered were they school books. Did he have a job in a library? During the next two weeks while we older kids worked alongside him, brushing peach fuzz off peaches or grading them for size and ripeness before putting them into different containers, we learn to call the hobo, Mr. Clark, and we quizzed him mercilessly. He told us, yes, in Minnesota, where he was born and raised, there were many Indians. But no, they didn't wear headgear with feathers, or live in tents or ride horseback, or make war with homesteaders. They worked in the wheat Mill, just like everyone else. And just like everyone else, they lost their jobs after the Wall Street Crash. And yes, like the Poles and Irish, they were given to heavy drinking. Mr. Clark never rode the freight cars, because if you did, the railroad men would hit you with billy clubs and down and out drifters would steal your shoes while you slept if you took them off. Even if you tied them around and your neck, or through your belt, they simply cut the shoelaces. He told us he had left home early that spring, and as mama had correctly surmised, his family lived with his wife's parents. He described how he walked all the way from Minnesota, avoiding large cities where he knew there was no work for people who kept books and told us he didn't have the stomach to join the angry men who preached and badmouthed the government, tossing red sheets of paper, urging protests and marches. He avoided hobo camps where fights broke out between those who wanted America to change into a communist or socialist nation, and those he didn't. Days Later, near the end of the peach season, I pondered a question over and over. It had been easy for me to picture Mr. Clark with his family, teaching his son to write numbers and beaming at his wife like Noel Coward in the movie,

Private Lives. But I didn't know where he kept his books. Were they in his mother-in-law's house? I kept books and st. Paul's Bank of Minnesota for 12 years. Sort of like school, mostly adding and subtracting, taking time to get the right answer. Last year, the bank failed. Failed? I wondered what test Banks took. He smiled. The bank, ran out of money. It closed for good. It wasn't just me who lost his job. Everyone who worked there lost his job, even the president. He sounded like he felt sorry for the president. I knew Papa didn't like President Hoover. So I stopped asking questions. After the peaches were all picked, packed and sent to market Mr. Clark stayed on for the rest of the summer. He lived in the quarters on one side of the barn over the storage area. Where caretakers had lived in earlier years when he spent winters in the city. He helped pick the concord grapes that ripen after the peaches. But once he had harvested all the grapes in the vineyard, Papa couldn't afford him anymore. And I can't find my last page. Well, let's see. All I have on my last page is that he walked down the driveway and waved goodbye. And my mother said he looked homesick. And when he stopped and we waved at him and he waved back, he didn't turn north the way he had been walking when we came, he turned West. Mama said, I hope he's going home. And as he started to walk, I wondered would he ever tell little Ingrid about us. And he put a letter in the mailbox, and when I peeked this time, it had no return address, and that's it. Thank you for this long, long reading. Well, thank you.

00:52:07 Peggy Sturdivant

I think we are all absolutely wrapped. And I have to say that even though you couldn't find the last page, it was all the more meaningful to be able to see your face tell us, you know, away from the light. So it's almost like you delivered it. I feel like you delivered it into our hands. That's absolutely beautiful.

00:52:30 Eleanor Devito Owens

Well, and if any of you want it, I can email it to you, because I don't see all that well. Actually in three weeks, four weeks, I will be 101. So I, I just I don't see well, and I'm too paranoid to get my cataracts removed. You know, we all list. We are listed in One Direction or the other - my tincture of paranoia. I'm a good cook. But every now and then I burned the beans, and I'm too fearful. I'm too fearful of someone fiddling with my eyes.

00:53:20 Peggy Sturdivant

I hear ya. So a couple people want to know, you know, what is it in published? So has it. So you willing to share a copy with people? Or ...

00:53:30 Eleanor Devito Owens

Yeah, I'm more than happy to do it. I can send it to you. I'll send it to you, and you can you can send it out. But, you know, it's part of a memoir. And right now, I'm really struggling. It's over 80000 words, and I'm struggling to tighten it. What can I leave out? And even though several of the chapters are interesting, I don't know, I don't know that they have to be in there.

00:54:07 Peggy Sturdivant

The term is killing your babies, which sounds really horrible? Sometimes you're right. Yes. Yes. Yes. The consensus is...

00:54:20 Eleanor Devito Owens

Thank you for sharing. 80000 is fine. I lied. I think it's 85000

00:54:28 Peggy Sturdivant

5,000 is nothing.

00:54:29 Eleanor Devito Owens

Well, you know, I'm determined, I'm ... for some nutty reason or other, I can't send out a query letter. I just can't do it. And it's because I honestly believe they go into the slush pile. All the other writers in my writers group send them out and they all get rejected. And so I just I may even I'm researching self-publishing just so I can only because I'm as old as I am am if I and I think traditional Publishers takes several years, no matter what.

00:55:10 Peggy Sturdivant

Well, I think that we'd all love to help you with different. There's a lot of expertise across the it's about time. And this group. She Writes Press is a wonderful one that might be I've got a lot of ideas. We'll have to continue this. And I have an idea that, you know, especially someone who's about to be 101 shouldn't have to do it all themselves. So there's many... Yes, what we're going to do now is we have at least one other person who's going to do the open mic, and then I'll open it up for a discussion, which I may turn off the recording. But I'd love to hear more about your process as I'm sure we all would, and people have advice. And so one of the lovely things has been having a chance to have kind of like a little book chat afterwards. And I just also want to say, before we moved to the open mic person that I'm so glad having spoken to you years ago, Eleanor, and then having you come to attend when it's about time, at least in person, I'm delighted to finally have you as a reader. So I will. I'm going to introduce now Ellen Young for our final open mic, and then we'll open it up to our own little kind of chat panel. So Ellen,

00:56:35 Ellen Young

I'm gonna just going to read a couple of poems from Lost in the Green Wood, which is my latest book. And it's published by Atmosphere Press, which is a sort of self-publishing helper press. So that's another piece for Eleanor to consider. They don't accept everything. But if they do, they just take you through the whole process. And I did this because I couldn't go on submitting this forever. I had to move on. So I'm reading just to this book called Lost in the Greenwood about tapestries from around 1500. And I'm going to refer to this picture on the back of the book, which is from tapestries in France. And this is describing this woman. Seeing. Standing in garb of rose, gray and vermillion. He's poised, not posing. Is it the one wild strand of her hair that persuades me perhaps smile is genuine. The gentle unicorn and petite but regal lion, are they pets or prisoners like the gold on blue brocade of her tent? The artist draws me to believe she's favored. Chosen. These tapestries were ordered by a man named Jean La'veast, who had the misfortune, quite a misfortune in 1500 France of having no sons and had three daughters. The eldest was Claude. And so she received his inheritance. Claude,



Le beasts Inheritance. Father, Chateau Darcy, your three crescents carved in its stone, whispers your name. Once I believed in unicorns, believed I could mimic the perfect poise of these elegant ladies. Please you, standing beside my Noble husband. You wished for sons. At your end, did you suspect I'd bear neither sons nor daughters to inherit these fine weaving. They glare at me, every panel decked with your banners, women as draped statues. Flesh, I walk cold halls in a house in need of repair, while the whole Chateau ceaselessly whispers your name. Thank you.

00:59:58 Peggy Sturdivant

I hope you'll join us again another time.

01:00:04 Peggy Sturdivant

So now I'm going to end the recorded portion, and I want to thank you all so much. And that way you'll all feel free to, you know, have are authorial chitchat.

