



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #372

00:00:02 Peggy

Good evening, and welcome to reading number 372 of the It's About Time Writers Reading series. I'm very excited to have a lot of longtime friends, and familiar, wonderful faces from the It's About Time series here tonight. I'd like to start this evening by just paying a brief tribute to another longtime friend of the series, and that is the writer and essayist John McFarland. He died last week, he was included in our anthology, which was published last year- the So Dear Writer... -and he was able to read at that launch event on his, he read from his essay Master Guides on the Revision Trail. He had had a near-death experience and so the years that we had him after his heart was restarted, were very much bonus years. So I'd just like to pause and read you from the bio. He was supposed to read in April and that was the first month that the series went online. He was not ready to go online for that trial night. However, Where he participated in our dress rehearsals, as we all learned how

00:01:35 Peggy

to get on to zoom and provided ongoing feedback. In fact, I had always known him as a presence at the back of the room and he was incredibly supportive online, he joined every month and would send me very encouraging messages about, you know, how, well, it it gone. So I would just like to read from, you know, his bio. Which unfortunately I didn't have a chance to read last April and introducing him. John McFarland is a short story writer, essayist and critic, his fiction and essays have appeared in the literary journals Ararat, Caliban and String Town as well as in the anthologies, The Next Parish Over, a collection of irish-americans writing, and the Isherwood Century, essays on the life and work of Christopher Isherwood. His book for young readers The Exploding Frog and Other Fables from Aesop was selected by Parent's Choice Magazine is one of the best Illustrated books of 1981. His story, A Secret of the Andies won first prize, children's picture book category, at the 1992 Pacific Northwest

00:02:48 Peggy

Writers Conference and was later, published as a centerpiece in Cricket Magazine's soccer issue of September 1997. He was recently published In our So Dear Writer... and so I'm so honored that at least before with the shutdown that I got to hear him read his essay in person at Elliot Bay last year. So sad to have lost such a great supporter he and his partner Chandler were almost always they're listening in person. Tonight I'm happy to welcome. Donna Miscolta, Catalina Marie Cantú, and Kathleen Alcalá. And Claudia Castro Luna was, will have to join us another time she had obligations but I am delighted to be able to and I'm reaching around for my other book to be able to have in

person and have had the great pleasure of hearing one of the Angie Rubio Stories from Donna read to us couple years ago at It's About Time and to see the beautiful book in print. So the first reading will be with Donna Miscolta. Her third book of fiction is this beautiful book, I just held up, it's about lessons

00:04:11 Peggy

of a young Mexican American girl, the world that favors neither race nor gender. Released from Jaded Ibis Press in September 2020. Her story collection, *Hola and Goodbye*, winner of the Doris Bakwin award for writing by a woman and published by Carolina Wren Press, won an Independent Publishers Award for Best Regional Fiction and an International Latino Book Award for best Latino Focus Fiction. She's also the author of the novel, *When the Dela Cruz Family Danced*, from Signal 8 Press. Welcome Donna Miscolta.

00:04:48 Donna

Thank you Peggy. It's a pleasure to be here to see all your faces. And yes, Peggy mentioned- *Living Color and Angie Rubio Stories* was published in September. And it is a collection of stories about a character named, Angie Rubio, who learns various life lessons as she progresses through school. And those life lessons are often related to race or gender and what it's like to be a brown girl in America but this these excerpts that I'm reading tonight, basically, just focus on

00:05:36 Donna

what it's like to be an awkward teenage girl.

00:05:45 Donna

Yeah, so here we go.

00:05:50 Donna

"She headed to her afternoon class- Mrs. Brimsler's 10th grade sex education class- where Angie was assigned to the front row, Angie witnessed up close Mrs. Brimsler blushing at the rude sounds that erupted during her lectures, which she dealt with by passing out cough drops, as if her students were merely innocent throat clears. Her black-framed glasses imprisoned, her scared blue eyes, which flitted to the fluorescent lights overhead or the institution green, linoleum beneath her sensible pumps to avoid eye contact with the smirking adolescents in the classroom that always seemed so airless. Her thin lips pursed whenever she was not painfully articulating in a tiny voice, the details of genitalia on the mechanics of menstruation, which she mispronounced as menis-stration, or the process of birth. It was inevitable that she would be referred to as Mrs. Primslar behind her back. Despite the awkwardness, Angie was serious about the class. Serious about learning. Serious about earning

00:06:59 Donna

an A. One day, after they had labeled diagrams of female and male parts and written down the function of each and objective clinical terms, Mrs. Brimsler explain the physiological changes that occurred during intercourse, pausing every so often to dispense a cough drop. It was October, but the

weather was still summer warm. Nevertheless, Mrs. Brimsler shut the door to the classroom. 'Take out a fresh sheet of paper,' she squeaked. There were groans and frantic last-minute glances at notebooks- at diagrams and vocabulary words. 'This is a quiz,' Mrs. Brimsler said, holding up her hand like a stop sign to halt the complaints. 'You will not turn it in,' she said. There were sighs of relief, but Angie didn't like those terms at all. What was the point of getting answers right if no one was going to know about it,? If it wasn't going to escalate her already healthy grade point average? Mrs. Brimsler cleared her throat. 'I'm going to read aloud 10 questions. Write the answers on your paper.' With the door

00:08:07 Donna

closed, the room was- the room was starting to heat up and Mrs. Brimsler's face was heating up with it. 'Hey, can we open the door?' Max Delgado asked. He was slumped in his seat, his legs stretched out into the aisle. Max never raised his hand to speak and Mrs. Brimsler invariably chided in her child's voice that anyone wishing to speak must raise his hand and sit up straight. This time though, she folded her lips into each other, bussled to the back of the room and turned off the overhead lights. 'That should help,' she said turning redder as she turned to face the class. 'You must answer each question as truthfully as you can.' Angie's hand began to sweat making her pencil slippery and she knew that she would fudge her answers. Mrs. Brimsler read each question, twice, her eyes blinking behind her glasses, her voice croaking with the strain of pronouncing, each word. The questions were alarming to Angie. She had had no problems with the genitalia diagrams or saying, penis or vagina, or scrotum-

00:09:18 Donna

all words that sounded wicked with their long vowels and labiodental consonants, yet were proper terminology. Proper was what Angie was all about. She could say those words without giggling or blushing. She could draw them with the detachment of a scientist. But the questions issuing from Mrs. Brimsler's prim mouth were on a topic shockingly personal and humiliatingly non-applicable to Angie. 'Have you ever kissed a member of the opposite sex?' Mrs. Brimsler read from her list. There were smirks and guffaws all around because who in the 10th grade hadn't been kissed? Angie stared at her blank page and then very faintly, the led just skimming the paper, she penciled in no. But with a subsequent questions what Angie feared became evident- the kiss was the least of the actions. Everything that followed was one move closer to the act and there was no way she could fudge the answers. No boy had ever touched her breasts. They hardly existed. Her vagina or clitoris. Likewise she had never fondled, kissed, or

00:10:30 Donna

sucked a penis. She'd never exercised birth control. Never had one, two, or more sexual partners. Answering no to the first question virtually guaranteed that no would be repeated down the page. But wait, there was that time she and little Eddie had collided during an illicit game of indoor hide-and-seek. It was only a few years ago when they should have longer the left such play behind. They both ended up on the hallway floor, Angie sprawled across her cousin. Dazed for a moment, they stared at each other before Eddie, the film buff, shouted 'Burt Lancaster and Deborah Carr in From Here to Eternity,' and yanked Angie's mouth to his. A kiss is a kiss, no matter what had happened, or under

what circumstances, Angie reasoned, even when the boy who kissed her was her cousin. Even when that cousin was pretending to be Deborah Carr. Angie didn't dare take her eraser to her page. Instead she penciled a yes over her no to question 1, But she couldn't in good conscience change her other answers. Usually

00:11:37 Donna

during quizzes, she left her paper exposed in case Wanda across the aisle from her needed to borrow correct answer or two. Today she covered her paper with her arm. They were told to tally their scores. Each yes, answer was worth one point, each no worth zero. And he looked at her measly questionable point half, happy after all that her grade point average would not be affected by her score. 'If you scored zero to two points,' Mrs. Brimsler said, reading from the score key while she was also trying to survey the room. 'You are behind most of your peers. Be aware of pitfalls in trying to catch up.' Everyone looked around including Angie, who did so to throw off track anyone who might suspect her score. If you scored three to five points, you're on par with most of your classmates. They were self-congratulatory smiles and audibles sighs from some of the girls. 'If you scored six to eight points, you are above the average. Exercise caution in your decisions.' There were chuckles from some

00:12:49 Donna

of the boys. 'If you scored nine to ten,' squeaked Mrs. Brimsler, whose pink cheeks looked ready to combust, 'You need to seriously reconsider your actions and their potential consequences.' 'I'll keep that in mind,' Ricky Fernandez said, in a low voice it was heard by everyone. While some girls gasped, even Angie knew Ricky's score range, the highest one indicating flagrant decadent sex, was no surprise. She remembered him from elementary school. He was a flirt even then- no one beneath his notice, not even Angie whom he had palmed in the small of her back, perilously close to her tailbone one morning when they were both at school early in an empty hallway. No one doubted his score. A tiny chirp of disapproval escaped Mrs. Brimsler's clamped lips. She turned on the lights, opened the door, the sudden small gust of air mocking her sigh. A crumbling of paper further heckled her composure. The bell rang and she nearly startled out of her sturdy shoes before she leaned with relief

00:13:58 Donna

against a chalkboard to let her students herd themselves out the door. Angie found herself behind Max, whose fist squeezed a wad of paper. The veins of his wrist popped, his biceps flexed and then relaxed, as he dropped the balled up paper into the trash can on his way out. Someone nearby fished it out. Angie's own sheet of answers was tucked into her notebook, which she clutched to her chest. By lunchtime word had spread about the quiz. Students who wouldn't have sex education class until the following semester either thrilled or paled at the gossip. Though few students who took the quiz shared their scores, a number was attached to everyone. Those who didn't reveal their number were assigned one by consensus. Then there was Max Delgado. It turned out, he had answered every one of Mrs. Brimsler's questions with the same two letters, followed by an exclamation mark: Ha! Was it scorn at the idiocy of the quiz or did it know the score on par with that of Ricky Fernandez? And even

00:15:07 Donna

though Angie was sure that no one's number was the undiluted truth, it was clear to her that everyone was far ahead of her. The evidence was all around her in the hallways with couples pushed up against lockers, making out, eyes closed to the looky-loos. After school, Angie sat on her bed trying to make sense of her geometry assignments. She drew and labeled an isosceles triangle on her homework sheet. It looked slightly sexual. Everything looked sexual to her now.

00:15:41 Donna

Angie decided she was on her own when it came to The Facts of Life. It's not as though she'd had no introduction whatsoever. She'd seen Valley of the Dolls and she was 14. Her mother inexplicably, allowing her to go with Nelda and Eva. Nelda and her mother had been whispering in the kitchen was Saturday afternoon, when Angie walked in dressed in her candy striper uniform. The whispering stopped. Nelda looked up and grinned at Angie. 'Hey there Cherry Ames. Solve any Hospital Mysteries lately? Save any lives?' Angie didn't answer Nelda's questions, hoping to make clear she had never read the books about the mystery-solving nurse. That she had different literary taste than Nelda. 'Looks like the cat's got her tongue,' Nelda said. She did that often. Spoke of Angie and the third person when Angie was two feet in front of her. 'I'm going for my shift,' Angie said to the room and anyone in it who happened to hear her. 'Maybe I will invite her after all,' Nelda said, Angie, on the doorknob, stopped. 'Who?'

00:16:43 Donna

she asked. 'Where?' 'Nelda is taking Eva to see Valley of the Dolls,' her mother said. 'She's old enough,' Nelda said. 'So am I,' Angie said. She was dying to see the much-hyped movie about sex and drugs. Nelda and her mother exchange looks and shrugged. 'Okay, you're in,' they said. Angie realized later the movie was a substitute for any birds and bees talk her mother or even Nelda in her stead would otherwise be obliged to give. During the movie, Angie noted the morality tale about drugs, ambition, greed, and the general perilousness of being a woman. But what she focused on was the sex. Sex. Right there in the movie theater, sitting between Eva and Nelda she experienced an alarming pleasurable warming of her body. Every cell in it from her scalp to the soles of her feet prickling with ferocious awareness and a soft ruckus of waves engulfing her, and lifting her out of her seat. She hadn't wanted to take her eyes off the action, yet she was tempted to glance at Nelda and Eva to see their reactions.

00:17:55 Donna

Both were fixed on the screen. Eva's expression tight. Nelda's face in meltdown. Later in the car, Nelda and her face only partially restored, looked at them. 'Any questions?' Eva said no. Angie, her underpants a sticky mess, shook her head. Nelda revved the engine and drove out of the parking lot." Thank you.

00:18:30 Peggy

Thank you so much is, as a person who had to- I believe was there some review that said, you know, couldn't put it down, I'm like- it's true. You just kind of sucked from year to year and you just, like, I couldn't put it down. And so there's a certain irony in that, as much as I hated high school, I kind of

hated Senior Year [laughter] because it meant the end of my time with Angie Rubio. So. Which also gives me an opportunity- I don't know how many of you have seen today, The Secret Garden, which is my local independent bookstore, is featured on The Seattle Times homepage because they've done an article about if you're going to shop for independent, bookstores, start early. And so, when I happen to be checking to see what Governor Inslee was going to be telling us tonight in his address, Yes, I saw that, they were not only had done an insert in the addition, the print edition this week, but they were featured on the homepage. So, just a reminder that any of our wonderful, local independent bookstores need us now

00:19:43 Peggy

more than ever, so. Thank you again, Donna. It's now my pleasure to introduce Catalina Marie Cantú. She is a multi-genre writer, interdisciplinary artist, Jack Straw Fellow, and VONA Voices Alum. Her writing has been published in La Bloga, Poetry on Buses... I'm just uh- I'm sorry for the pause. I'm making sure we switch to Catalina here. Okay. Poetry on Buses... Seattle Poetic Grid, Raven Chronicles Magazine, Signs of Life/Facèré Jewelry Art Gallery magazine, The Inspired Poet Workbook, Pictures of Poets, and Take a Stand Art Against Hate: A Raven Chronicles Anthology. Catalina holds a B.A. in La Raza Studies and a J.D. from the University of Washington. As a volunteer attorney, she managed the King County Bar Association Bilingual Spanish Legal Clinic. She is a co-founding member and current President of La Sala Artists' Network. Catalina is currently finishing her braided essay collection and her first YA novel. Welcome Catalina.

00:21:06 Catalina

Hey. Thank you Peggy and thank you to the It's About Time series

00:21:12 Catalina

and The Seattle Public Library. I have four pieces to share with you this evening inspired by mi familia. The first is a poem I wrote in a Lit Fuse Workshop that will be published in an English/Spanish anthology next year and I'm just reading the English version. It's called 'If Only.' "Now honey, your life is in your hands, but people won't give you nothing unless you work for it. And even then because you're a brown girl, you'll have to work twice as hard as them. But you a smart girl. Thanks to the brains you inherited from me and willingness to read everything you come across. Learn from what you read, don't just get by on using your good looks, quick wit, and kindness to strays. You can do well in this godforsaken world of cutthroats, spellweavers, dream-snatchers, and breakers of hearts. Just don't let some green-eyed long-legged fast-talking young man, get ahold of you and twist you like a tornado. Keep your feet on the ground, your head, on your shoulders and your eyes focused

00:22:25 Catalina

on your future, not his Then honey, your life is in your hands. Go forth and make it your own." And the next piece is... I was asked to write...

00:22:46 Catalina

This is a brooch... I was asked to write a thousand words about this brooch for the Signs of Life Magazine for Facèré jewelry art. So the following piece is rooted in my family history. It's called Radio

Flyer Badge. "Danny kick the black rubber Radio Flyer wagon wheels. Today's race is to see who can go the fastest and hit the most rocks and ruts. Who wants to help me win? I need a volunteer to sit in my new Radio Flyer wagon. The prize is all the ice cream you and your friends can eat at the new Baskin and Robbins. He pulled off his Dodgers hat. Ran his palm over his crew, cut and surveyed, the dozen boy, and girl cousins, all older and taller than me. None step forward. The girls strut their shoulders, flounced heir ponytails and went inside to play dolls. 'CeCe. I can do it.' A ride in a Radio Flyer, was way better than playing with silly dolls. That red wagon topped my Christmas list. I climbed inside the sleek, strong steel bed felt warm from the morning sun. I grasped the long black

00:24:01 Catalina

handle to move the front wheels side to side. I knew Danny would take care of me. He always did. I couldn't wait to start. Danny looked down inside. 'Listen peanut,' he said. 'See all those rocks. And potholes out there on Helix Road?' His hands swept the area in front of my face. 'Well, next week, a big truck will come and pound those rocks and ruts into the ground with a giant hammer. This is our last chance to do a rocks and ruts race.' The other neighborhood boys lined up their red wagons with their dogs cats or GI Joes in them. I was the only human tester. 'Hey Danny,' Jose said. 'Why you got a midget in your wagon?' 'That's no midget.' Danny said. 'That's my [speaking Spanish], my little cousin braver than any of you suckers.' He could dirt toward them to challenge. 'Just because your dad's a cop don't mean we can't fight you,' Felix said. 'Do you want to see how well my dad taught me how to fight?' said, Danny, with his fists up, ready and willing for all takers. 'Relax. You made your point,' Jose said, 'Let's

00:25:09 Catalina

race.' As Danny wrapped Tio Nacho's old gun belt around the wagon and me, he said, 'lay down peanut and you will be okay. The Radio Flyer is guaranteed not to tip over.' Danny's finger gripped the u-shape end of the Radio Flyer's extended handle and pulled us to the starting line of yellow cornmeal poured across one end of Helix Road. The midday heat rippled across the t-shirts of our [speaking Spanish] as they posted themselves along the spiral wrap. Each Primo had a palm-sized notebook and golf pencil to mark every time they're assigned wagon hit a rut or a rock. Our [speaking Spanish] cousin Pepe held a red t-shirt and said 'On your mark, get set-' At the end of the road, a mirage of liquid appeared as if there were a river at the end, a river to jump into after the race to cool our bodies. Texas trickery. I had to pee. Pepe said '[speaking Spanish] let's race.' 'Hold on tight, peanut,' Danny yelled as we hit rocks and ruts. I screamed. Bounced like a yo-yo. I yelled. Dirtballs flew up, hitting my face and arms. The crowd cheered.

00:26:16 Catalina

We were neck and neck in the lead, when suddenly the front wagon wheels hit a deep pothole. I pitched forward, grabed the belt, but it came with me. And I fell on my face, what tears, I close my eyes, felt warm, peep or on the road. Texas baptism. I woke to a twenty-five pound ice bag on my face and Danny stroking my hand. 'Did we win?' I asked. 'Yes.' But then Danny kept saying, lo siento, lo siento, snot dripping from his nose onto my arm. Jeez. If only his I'm sorry's could take away the elephants sitting on what used to be my nose. Then Papa and Mama rushed in, yelling at Danny and the other cousins for not looking out for me. From under the ice bag shroud. I said 'It's not their fault. I

wanted to race. Danyy won. Can we get praline swirl ice cream?' The scent of Papa's cigarette breath tickled my nostrils as he gently removed the ice bag. '[speaking Spanish] Danny,' he said, as he scooped me up and placed me on Mama's lap in the car. She cradled us, me and the ice bag from my face. Though fuzzy with pain, I

00:27:26 Catalina

felt warm and loved. Papa drive fast to see Dr. Brody. Yes. Our family doctor in Brownsville, his little pink pill knocked me out over the Few weeks my blackened and bloodied nose healed with one nostril slightly larger than the other and a bump below the bridge. Dr. Rodriguez said the bump would grow straight as I grew older. We believed him. A decade later, my Northwest orthodontist showed me the x-rays of my head. The broken nose bones had overlapped into an oval bump where my nose had healed crooked without treatment. Texas medicine. One day, I may have nasal surgery to help me breathe better in our Northwest damp Winters and pollen Springs yet when I look at my nose, I can still hear Danny yelling, the crowd cheering and savoring praline swirl ice cream. These memories trigger a deeper connection with mi Familia to keep that oval bump. My badge of bravery on the Texas-Mexico border."

00:28:32 Catalina

We're up to that piece number three, which was originally written for a non fiction workshop. With [unintelligible] at Hugo House and [inaudible].

00:28:44 Catalina

It's called Shoes. "Sturdy shoes for school said Mama, we can only afford one pair, and they have to last all year. These Buster Brown Oxford's are indestructible and looky here. Why the color it almost matches her legs. Said the clerk. Just add a matching sock and she will look three inches taller. What do you think little lady? Boxcar Oxford's the color of dog doo extended from my stove pipe legs. I like the red Mary Jane's. Dorothy's shoes without the sprinkles. I'll be real careful Mama. But arched eyebrow, a gentle shake of her curls, a white fingered glove to her lips. Shoes hurt my feet. I refuse to wear them at home. Being barefoot was freedom from Mama's rules to stress sit and walk like a little lady. Back home in Texas my [speaking Spanish] called me a tomboy because I love to climb trees, did not scream when I picked up worms and bugs and raced all the brown boys in the neighborhood. Red Keds were my racing shoes. No one could catch me. But now, I was going to school up North. I had to dress like

00:30:01 Catalina

a girl and wear ugly shoes that demanded she be double tyed. Their [unintelligible] woven loops flounced with double dutch jump rope, slick leather soles slipped on tree trunks and wet grass. My knees and shins, festooned with Band-Aids. Awkward and anxious. For my complexion, a complexion on the darker side of Mama's pale, just shy of three feet tall at age 6, my family nickname was peanut." And our last piece- final piece I'm sharing this evening is a poem. I wrote and performed for the August 2019 Poets and Artists for Migrant Justice reading that occurred in Seattle in other cities across the U.S. to raise money for migrant justice. And this fall before the election, I rewrote this poem to provide a road map for the future. It's called Seeds of Justice. "Dear Papa, on your

hundredth birthday migrant children were imprisoned in your hometown of Brownsville, Texas. Also known as Brownsville [speaking Spanish]. A sucker punch for the mamas y papas separated from their mijos. I remember, Papa, how

00:31:13 Catalina

you taught me to work hard that in yet, there's a war in plain sight on brown people who look like us. My [speaking Spanish] and clenched fist won't bring back the twenty two people murdered in El Paso. A racist, Manifesto for Mexican Chicano Latinx People everywhere. Targeted, harassed, detained, Not The American Dream promised. Undocumented and in fear of deportation to home lands of rape, murder, and violence. A recipe for keeping America Great? I can hear you side, Papa, for your beloved Tejas and our Familia still living there. [speaking Spanish]. They tried to bury us. They didn't know, we were seeds, you were one of those seeds Papa despite obstacles. You challenged Injustice and racism in World War II and the workplace. When English was not your first language and you moved us Tejas to Washington away from Familia, espanol and [speaking Spanish]. A pioneer of justicia and brown, man. You wanted the best for your children. Like the migrants

00:32:26 Catalina

on the trip [speaking Spanish], you each desired, the American dream. Thanks to you Papa, we got some of it. College educated professionals. Home Owners. My children, went to private and public schools. Now, they work in Tech and health. With our privilege seeds planted throughout the country. We are courageous, strong and tenacious. Yet, our Brown migrant sisters and brothers are incarcerated. Their children scattered like leaves. They are seeds that deserve justice. Let's reach into our privileged pockets, to support legal advocacy. I like people to change legislation to welcome families with a path to citizenship. Until then our struggle continues. Because we are brown without respect. For our human dignity. Papa. My children and I were, often asked, were you born in this country? Curiosity or ignorance? Where is the respect for us as human beings, as people of color? Although born in the USA, [speaking Spanish] my identity as a radical Brown woman mother and Abuelita surviving racial oppression

00:33:46 Catalina

in the USA writing for justice and freedom for the next wave of migrants. [speaking Spanish]" And thank you very much for this opportunity.

00:34:04 Peggy

Thank you so much, Catalina. Beautiful. I'm so glad you had a chance to revise, that and share that. So needed. So after Kathleen, our next reader reads, if anybody is interested in doing the open mic, please let me know by probably by chat. Otherwise we'll do an actual chat where if you don't have to run off, we have a chance for sort of a little virtual talk, you know, you get to ask the little more QA. So, our next reader is Kathleen Alcalá and she is a creative writing instructor and the author of six books. Most recently, *The Deepest Roots: Finding Food and Community on a Pacific Northwest Island*. A member of los nortefios writers, she is a founding editor of *The Raven Chronicles* and the member of the Opata Nation. Her first novel, *Spirits of the Ordinary*, will be re-published in 2021 by Raven Chronicles press. She

00:35:16 Peggy

will be reading a short story called Dear Dancer, from a collection of stories by people of color called New Suns edited by Nisi Shawl. Well then, welcome Kathleen.

00:35:29 Kathleen

Thank you Peggy. And thank you, too, About Time. I was thinking the last time I was on this program was probably towards the beginning of it. 30 years ago.

00:35:42 Peggy

Too long.

00:35:43 Kathleen

Oh no, a long time ago. And it's also a great tonight to read with Catalina and Donna, those of you who tuned in to see Claudia Castro Luna, she's appearing on another channel tonight. So, another time. Tonight I'm going to read Dear Dancer, most of it which is in a collection called New Suns edited by Nisi Shawl, and it's the collection has already received several awards, which is pretty great. Dear Dancer. "'Ha,' she said, jiggling the wrench. 'I've got you.' The pipe came loose with a grating sound and she reached in and unscrewed it the rest of the way. Rusty, water dribbled out the end as she scuttled from under the house, waving the pipe section in the

00:36:35 Kathleen

air. Brownish water splattered her shirt. It felt good. 'Found it. It will be easy to fix,' she said, wondering if they could find pipe the same diameter and long enough to repair the plumbing. This was the fifth house she had helped rehab and Tater was beginning to think of herself as an expert in the undersides of the houses. Shonda took the pipe from her and fingered the rusty hole. 'How you going to find the right size?' 'We've got a whole pile from the other houses around here. One of the most have used the same size, maybe even the same plumber in the first place. All these houses were built about the same time.' The sun- Mother Sun- blazed down and Tater pulled her hat forward from where it hung down her back on a skirt on a string. 'We'd better get home.' It was five bells since first light and unless they plan to spend the rest of the day under the house, they needed to get back. Walking single file Shonda took the lead, poking any suspicious-looking soil with her walking stick before proceeding.

00:37:46 Kathleen

Tater carefully set her feet and Shondra's prints until they came to a place where the houses were lively with people preparing for midday Siesta. Gia was just pulling protective burlap sacking back over a patch of taters after digging up a few. The gray nubs did not look like much as they sat steaming on the ground, but washed and sliced into brilliant purple discs, they would glow. Tater's mom had named her after the [unintelligible]. Brought from Peru by long ago voyagers the potatoes had taken to the Northwest like, well, like no other plant or animal. Tater was proud of her unusual name and secretly hoped she was like them- ordinary at first look but gem-like on the inside, rooted. Tater was still carrying the pipe. 'What you going to do with that?' asked Gia. 'Mash it, then recycle.

The rest of the pipes held up good. This one is far enough gone reuse might be able to smash it into dust for the iron.' Tater splashed some water on her neck and hung up her hat. Out of the sun now, she rolled up

00:38:59 Kathleen

her sleeves and served herself soup, she found cooling on the stove. Gia would stay up cooking so that the day crew would have something to eat when they woke from their midday slumbers around sundown. Night's work. Second shift. It used to be called graveyard shift, but that made too many people sad. What to think when the sun goes down and every light takes on a spectral aspect. My eyes, my eyes. Ever deceitful, ever necessary, for one who relies on visual cues, who only trusts the stimuli she takes in through the range of light and motion, the angular bounce of light at the solstice of sun streaming directly into our eyes as though to make up for all the days when we see no sun at all, how our limbs loosen and we tilt back our heads with a slight smile, drinking it in, who can deny the intoxication of sunlight, the touch of gold as it runs down our arms, from our fingertips. Our thighs grow slack as our lips part to drink in the pearly heat. Our pens rest on our tables, as our minds glide

00:40:14 Kathleen

away from the task at hand. Tater read a page in her aunt's diary, then set it aside. She had been given it years before, but had not tried to read it until it became until being assigned to housing rehab. She found it hard to sleep out here on the edges. Reading the old diary helped, she loved imagining what it was like before. When the sun was scarce. Tater lightly stroked the soft edges. It was the only book she owned herself and she found herself fingering the pages like worry beads. Tater laid back carefully in her hammock so as to not flip over, afraid of and grateful for the distance from the floor. Not that the rats wouldn't jump or climb up onto the hammock if they felt like it. But Tater felt better this way. Now she tried to imagine Aunt Ceci's life when water stayed in its place and the sun was a welcome embrace against the damp cold. She could barely remember ever being cold. 'Not sleeping?' asked Shonda as she came in. 'Not yet.' Shonda unhooked her own hammock from where it hung coiled

00:41:28 Kathleen

on the wall and took it outside. She preferred to sleep under the giant doug fir that sheltered their house. The tree that they had defended with guns and clubs early on. Tater could smell the taters cooking. There was an herb with them, something she could not quite place as she drifted off to sleep. Late afternoons were for domestic chores that included upkeep on the house where they homesteaded. If they could defend it for seven years, the house was their's. Most people stayed on waiting lists until a house opened up in the center, but that could take forever. Homesteading on the edges, offered larger properties enough to grow food and also dangers. But even for the edges, there were waitlists of people stacked sky high in mass housing. Tater barely remembered before. And there were some things in between that she could not think about it at all. Shonda gently shook Tater awake. It felt as though she had just dozed off, a dream of gear picking their way across the clearing fading gently

00:42:38 Kathleen

from her mind. 'Your turn to wash.' Tater dragged herself back to the waking world. She might have been having a true dream, but if that's what it was, it would come back. She would need to let the others know if it did. When she was a child of eight, it became clear that Tater got the dreaming. When she was 14, she was given her aunts Journal. Ceci was an original dreamer, born in Mexico, raised in the U.S. in secrecy by her family, given every advantage to learn the language, the ways of these people so that she could rescue the rest of her family from the label: them. Everyone in Ceci's family, including Tater's mom, worked every waking moment to keep Ceci the youngest in school and living long enough to pull her family through the tortuous knots of the legal system. She succeeded in her nieces and nephews became us as well. But that was all before. Dream. [unintelligible] grass, smell of humans. Water. Stillness. Stillness. Light slanting in for longer days. Humans took their

00:43:57 Kathleen

clues from the animals and had become diurnal. Afternoons were for chores, but night was guarding. Second shift got up and had breakfast with the day shift's dinner. Tater could spot nights on site. Like her, they had a dreamy look with large eyes and slightly larger nostrils. There was a lot of talk about whether this was adaptation after so few generations or just an affinity of nights for nights as partners, since that's who they got to know. Anyway, every household had a combination of days and nights. Tater joined the table next to Anna, one of the few nights she spoke to regularly. 'Sup?' 'Not too much, just talking about the bears spotted at the North End.' 'Again? They've no fright.' 'Sorrow's pretty sure she heard them talking again.' 'You mean like people talk?' 'Yeah she swears she can almost understand them.' Sorrow was at the other end of the table describing the bear sighting. She stood up and lumber down the length of the table, stopping stopping to smell each of their plates. Setting them

00:45:10 Speaker 1

laughing. 'Are the Bears changing or is it just you?' someone called out. Sorrow took her seat. They were eating eggs tonight, gathered from the summer chickens. 'Could be just me,' she said honestly. 'I've got so I can smell people coming even tell sometimes who it is.' Sorrow flexed her powerful hands and set to her [unintelligible]. 'Tater and me are going to need a full crew tomorrow,' said Shonda. 'Five people. Time to replace the roof on the Denny Way house so we can start on the inside. Plumbing's almost done. Tater's fast.' 'Who will you work with next?' asked Ana. Tater blushed and looked down. 'Not for me to say.' 'All in good time,' said Gia as she began to clear the table. 'She might have other Dawns she wants to develop.' Tater thought about that. Sometimes she forgot that she could choose what she wanted to work on who she wanted to work with. As long as it was for the common good. It hadn't been like that before or even for a while. After. Again, she had the strong feeling of the deer in the ravine near by and

00:46:22 Speaker 1

when she looked up, Sorrow had stopped eating and was staring down the table at her, still and alert. Tater pushed out her chair and stood up. 'I've got to go dream now,' she said. Shonda pointed at Ana and Gia who flanked Tater and escorted her out of the kitchen. Tater's team did not have a room set aside just for dreaming. She was the only one in their household and they all agreed it was a waste of

space in their small but shipshape house. But there was a bed in the main bedroom that was set aside for her. It folded out of the wall to offer a deep, safe space and a clerestory cast a diffused light in the room during the day. The bed was lowered and Tater climbed out of her day clothes into a soft cotton gown that did not inhibit her movement. That gown of pure cotton from before, was probably the most valuable thing the team owned. Tater was humbled by their goodness to her every time she put it on. Ana got a mug of water and Gia a towel. Sometimes the dreams could be rough and Tater

00:47:33 Speaker 1

lost control of her body. By the time, they had tucked Tater into the bed and settled into chairs on either side of her, she was no longer seeing the room and people around her. It had been a few months since she had last dreamed and the household was in some ways relieved to see what further instruction they might receive. She could still faintly hear their comforting voices. '[non-English language],' Ana urged. Sometimes the dream was clear and direct other times, they could only speculate what it meant and what they were expected to do with the information, but no one doubted the authenticity of the dreams.

00:48:20 Kathleen

When Tater woke, it was dark and very quiet. She was alone. 'You've got news for us.' Tater opened her hand to show Sorrow where the stiffened blood had resolved into the outlines of a map, their own settlement at the center the edge of stretching Beyond. They greeted the night with a collective roar. The members of the house were in full regalia. Tater, wearing her inherited, cocoon [unintelligible] leggings. She lifted her canes one in each hand and set the tip of each down the way a deer daintily makes its way through the forest. She turned her gaze this way and that in mimicry of the deer careful not to lose the antlers strapped to her head. The drummer beat a bowl with 2 6 turned upside down. Over a larger bowl of water creating a booming sound that carried for miles. Ana's voice wailed [unintelligible]. The dancers made their way forward and back, forward and back. Turning sideways and unison to appear larger to the unseen enemy. Arise. Arise Fair sun and kill the envious Moon. Dancers from other

00:49:37 Kathleen

houses flanked them, creating a front of noise and light against the outside. Tater felt vulnerable in her soft, doeskin clothing, conscious of how exposed her throat was each time she turned her head, knew that the bandage on her left hand showed she might be wounded. This is how they took back the world- step-by-step, song by song. At the end of the night, new fence posts would be pounded into place. New fence is strong. Tater lifted and set her canes carefully. The extra points of support allowed her to keep her feet close together as she pounded the ground with them, directing her energy deep into the Earth. Tater realized that if she ever had a daughter, she would name her Ossete. This was new. The consciousness that she might have a future beyond herself. Tater's face shown in the flickering light. It was good to be alive."

00:50:45 Kathleen

And on November 20th, the Science Friday book club is going to talk about this story. So look on Facebook somewhere there will be a link. Thanks.

00:50:58 Peggy

Thank you so much. And thank you for being willing to jump in there tonight.

00:51:05 Kathleen

Happy to.

00:51:05 Peggy

Sorry that it was almost 30 years. You must come back more frequently. [laughter].

00:51:10 Kathleen

Well, you know, all is possible with zoom.

00:51:13 Peggy

That's right. It's a I was at the curbside that the library today and said I'm glad that people don't have to venture out tonight. We can all be cozy and yet listen to one another read. Thank you. We are now going to hear from two different open mic readers. First I'll go first to Kevin O'Connor.

00:51:38 Kathleen

I did that thing where I hit the wrong button. Kevin,

00:51:46 Kevin

Okay, I've got one. I'm going to read and I decided to read this one because it has nothing to do with the pandemic or the election. I wrote this on the last day of an online Retreat, and it's called 17 Words. "The New York Times crossword puzzle lives to humiliate me. It starts me out easy on Monday morning, lulling me into a sense of complacency. By Friday. I can barely get a word in crosswise. My seven week stretch of successful Mondays currys no favor. Word after word crosses me, vexes me, throws me curves and drops me into the occasional rebus. Without a warning, without a word of warning that double crosses in. I'd have better luck filling in the black squares. Still, I keep coming back for cross after cross, word after word. Since when is that a word? A word with the management would be pointless, even with my reasonably decent vocabulary. I'd be at a lexical disadvantage, not enough words or words insufficient to describe the cross I must bear. I'm to retreat from these words

00:53:09 Kevin

that cross me, I will choose words myself and put them anywhere I want to in whatever order I want. I'll even make up a few of my own words and the editor of New York Times crosswords will not have word one to say about it. Word." Thank you.

00:53:33 Peggy

Thank you. It makes me realize as I looked at the first page of John MacFarlane's piece in the So Dear Writer... He talked about his primary resource as a writer is always the dictionary, our friend. Next I'm going to go to Maylene and I'm going to have her pronounce her last name so that I can.

00:54:03 Maylene

Yeah, it's Cavazos.

00:54:06 Peggy

Welcome.

00:54:07 Maylene

Thank you, thanks. I'm really nervous. Okay, this is a section from a chapter of a book. I'm writing from a 32 daily, water-only fast that I completed in June.

00:54:35 Maylene

When my grandfather came to Aberdeen Idaho, the landowners were taking out, 10% of the potato and beat workers paychecks and giving it to the Mormon Church. Even though most of the laborers were catholic, Don Manuel Cavazos put an end to the automatic deductions. When the cops wouldn't go after two dead bodies in the freezing cold waters of the Aberdeen Reservoir. My grandfather Don Manuel Cavazos said [unintelligible], I'll do it. He had the assurance of not well trained police or firefighters but the assurance of a laborer, a person of color, who knew how to survive in the worst of conditions. A person of color who knew how to dance and see the souls of people dead or alive. A person who understood the importance of a body, the Earth, the field, the potato, La Familia, [speaking Spanish] more than any comfort, any small sacrifice, any fear.

00:55:52 Peggy

Thank you.

00:55:56 Peggy

Thank you so much for also extending La Familia and joining us tonight. I hope that as we continue to meet online that we will have new attendees and new voices and I hope you will all come back to read. We are- you didn't show that you were nervous. It's About Time has always existed as a place for new and experienced writers and is one of the most welcoming places that I've known to try out new work. So we love to have someone at our Open Mic, whether it's in person or virtual. So I am now going to turn off the recording so that we can chat more freely. Next month, the It's About Time series is going to cross over with the Ballard writers collective. In 2010, I was one of the founders of the Ballard Writers Collective and we have had annual events, including, you know, events, not just annually ever since then, and just because we only see each other to wave at dog parks, etc. now, I figured that it would be efficient to have the Ballard writers 11th annual event be the December event for

00:57:23 Peggy

the It's About Time Writers Reading series. So I hope that even if you're not in Ballard, which it doesn't even matter anymore, that you will join us. Always the second Thursday of every month and stay tuned. And look on The Seattle Public Library site in future for when podcast will be available of these recordings.

