

Thought on Tap March 2020 Transcript

Future Visions of Storytelling

- Carlos Mariscal: 00:00 You're listening to a thought on tap a monthly podcast about the role of the humanities in the world today. Brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities program at the University of Nevada, Reno. I'm Carlos Mariscal, I'm Bretton Rodriguez, and I am Caitlin Earley, and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion. This month we're talking about Future Visions of Storytelling. And now we turn it over to our moderator David Fenimore. I'd like to thank tonight's sound engineer a new member of the team,
- David Fenimore: 00:30 Novelist Shawn Ross over there somewhere. And our Core Humanities administrator Chris Stancil who had to leave. Our dedicated student assistant Maddie Rose, over there. Our Core Humanities colleagues Bretton Rodriguez, Stephen Pasqualina, and all of you for coming over here tonight and listening to our panel discussion our topic this week - Oh and there's food if you didn't already notice, it's complimentary
- David Fenimore: 00:59 thanks to Laughing Planet and the Core Humanities program. Our topic this week is the future of storytelling. And let's get underway right away by introducing our panelists by the way I'd like to say that at some point during the night we're going to ask you to provide comments and feedback on a program called mentum meter. If you go to menti.com on your phone and enter this number here which I can't see but you can probably see it over there and one of those laminated cards you can provide some demographic information totally anonymous I promise and some comments on tonight's program.
- David Fenimore: 01:35 So let's introduce tonight's panelists. I'm going to start in the middle here with Everett George. Everett is the author of four plays that have been performed at Brukea theater as part of their "Biggest Little Theater festival. Everett's a founding member of the Roughtalk Sweethearts theater group and winner of Yale's Annual Young Native Playwright Competition. He currently works at a youth shelter out on the Rez and writes after his shift whenever he feels like it.
- David Fenimore: 02:05 On the end there Jessi LeMay who founded the Folk & the Lore, an ongoing live storytelling event through photography short films and true stories told out loud. Jessi documents the stories of her community and she says that "when you know your neighbors story you are more connected to your community." And last but not least David Anthony Durham ,the author of seven novels that range from literary fiction about the African-American experience, to war novels of the ancient world, to epic fantasy.
- David Fenimore: 02:40 David writes for George R.R. Martin's Wild Card series of collaborative novels and a screenwriting credits include working on one of the spinoff shows of the Game of Thrones series for HBO. He couldn't help it. His next novel, a middle grade fantasy called The Shadow Prince, is forthcoming in 2021. So welcome our panelists and thank them for showing up tonight. Thank you.
- David Fenimore: 03:11 I'm going to start by throwing out a question here and we're just going to go back and forth and see where it takes us. In her novel, Ceremony, Native American storyteller

Leslie Silko, member of the Laguna Tribe, wrote, "I will tell you something about stories. They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have. You see.

David Fenimore: 03:35

All we have to fight off illness and death." at a time when storytelling and story have become widely used terms of art and business and entertainment, politics ,education and so forth. What does the word story actually mean. What things does story mean. Can we just start by free associating about the word story start whatever it may be in the middle there. Oh interesting.

Everett George: 04:04

I think that story is just it's a it's a connection it's a way to connect to other people it's a way to connect to your own people that's a way for us all to connect with each other. That's what it's always been that's I believe that's always been its purpose. It's just a way for us to feel like we're not alone and to feel like we can be agreeable sometimes like we can.

Everett George: 04:28

We can have some kind of connection with each other and that's that's a very rare feeling and it's something that should be very prized and it's something that we've always had for some reason just throughout history we've always been talking to each other. We've always been telling stories to each other and it's something that's never stopped. And there's a reason for it. There's something very primal about it. There's something that just we just love about it and it's because we need it. It's vital as much as the arts are getting cut back.

Everett George: 04:57

It's something that is necessary and it's something that is a part of life. It's something that we need to live. And it's it's just yeah it's it's it's always been there. That's the best answer I can think of it. It's who we are. Thanks, any of you wanna chime in? Sure. Free association. And all that. Oh thank you [mumble] that associating.

David Durham: 05:26

I'm thinking of fire and people sitting around it and talking and sharing their stories of the day of who they imagine themselves to be, who they aspire to be as a people. All that stuff. I'm thinking umm video games, and comics and, well film, but you know that's not that great. Good cable dramas and streaming and just the notion that all these things are connected by by story and by our desire to connect over story to learn from story.

David Durham: 06:03

And I. The notion of like what is kind of what is story these days it feels like it has so many manifestations and so many different forms. But the core is all the stuff you were talking about really. I'm glad I got it. All right. So I'm gonna build off that. OK. There's a building body of research about story being this sort of uniquely human thing.

Jessi LeMay: 06:29

And there are researchers that say that you know the reason that humans are top of the food chain or one of the reasons is that we can say to our young don't go down by the river because there's a lion there and you'll be eaten right where every other species has to learn that the hard way. And so beyond that though and sort of from my lens and my work storytelling is place-making the stories that you hear from the people that are in your community help build this identity of who you are who you who are you in this place.

Jessi LeMay: 07:06

This little geographical place that you call home. And so I always look at it from that perspective because you know like I say in my storytelling event like when you know your neighbor story you're more connected to your community. And I say it over and over but I see it happen when people gather and you guys are here right now for the

same reason. Like when you're you are craving that thing that type of human connection.

- David Fenimore: 07:36 And so yeah answer that. Here's the campfire. So go back to I've been looking you guys up online you know. And I saw something that Everett wrote you wrote on a blog somewhere. Oh yeah yeah yeah I saw that. And you wrote [my grandma] "I used to think caring about stories was dangerous and could very much ruin your life. I began to wonder why all those words mattered if in the end they were just fake."
- Everett George: 08:07 Yeah. Yeah. Yeah that was a that was a big fear especially coming from a place like a reservation. A lot of people they they like they like movies they like books they like comic books they like the fact that it's there but there's a really big hesitation that actually creating it or actually doing that for yourself or making something that's your own. And so when I was always nervous to tell people that I would write or that I would do stories because there is that fear that they'd be like, Why?
- Everett George: 08:41 And I couldn't answer it doesn't answer that I just be like because I like it. And it's it's a tough thing to get over it's a tough thing to do. And like especially at that time when I was just starting to discover that I liked writing and that it was OK I had and I had the idea of false. Like putting false hope in something really freaked me out. I had an uncle that was an alcoholic and I saw that I had this fear that maybe me writing was just a way of me escaping the same way that heavy drinking was a way of him escaping.
- Everett George: 09:16 So there was that big fear that it was just fake and that I was just lying to myself and that I wasn't just I just trying to ignore whatever I was going through but I don't know something about that like the thing that changed my mind was I was I mean my brother we were both feeling really bad we had our grandma's house. I think I was like 13 and our uncle had just passed away and my grandma was a tough lady. She was a really tough lady. She wasn't very tough, sorry to grandma. She wasn't really tough. She was like, she was like more more rugged and tough. she was she.
- Everett George: 09:46 Like she never - I never really seen her read a book. I never seen her do anything like that but she was watching a movie and the movie that she was watching I think it was just on TV. She was watching the movie Dirty Dancing and I was watching her and I had never seen her get emotional over a story before. But at the end when they were dancing she was the happiest I'd ever seen in her life. And that was something that really changed me.
- Everett George: 10:14 Me and my brother we both just watched her and she was almost crying and she had been through a lot and she had kept the light in. But there is something about this story that had allowed her to open up and had allowed her to be how she wanted to be it allowed her to feel and even though it was just like you it's just like a silly movie but it meant something to her and it was able to bring something out of her something that is always there and that completely changed my perspective on the whole thing.
- Everett George: 10:46 That's what I want to do now. That's all I wanted. You know I want to make somebody feel like it's okay to be able to be themselves. Because she was herself she was really herself. She was like a young girl again. And that was amazing. That was really cool. I remember that feeling walking at a movie when I was a kid. Yeah. Somebody else. Yeah just a few minutes they just go play around you like hey I'm going into the movie. Yeah yeah. So David, speaking about stories as escapism, You write fantasy. I mean, that's your the generic title that would fit most of your work,

- David Fenimore: 11:18 Right? Am I wrong? Yes. No you're not wrong. I'm I'm I'm doing the math on the books and yeah I suppose ultimately I'm slightly more fantasy than historical fiction and literary fiction but Yeah. Well can you address this notion of stories as escapism versus stories that actually have some sort of a beneficial effect on the readers and in the case of movies the viewers. I mean do you feel like you're doing anything other than entertaining people. Oh hell yeah.
- David Durham: 11:48 Like it wouldn't be of interest if I wasn't I guess in in terms of my writing even the middle grade book I have coming out next which you know is for kids ultimately I always think that the I don't know the escapism part of it is to lure people in to give them a story that they engage with to reward them for their time spent that they spend Bringing my words to life because that's what they do.
- David Durham: 12:17 You know the words are dead on the page until someone interacts with them and imagines them. And that's that's where it lives. But I wouldn't want to write something that was purely entertaining. There always has to be something that's a bit more thematic but that has a resonance that means something to me and then I want to convey one way or another or explore in a story. So it's for me it's Oh it's absolutely always always both.
- David Durham: 12:44 And I I feel like as a writer and an aspiring writer an emerging writer although my emphasis was on the literary side of writing as I perceived at the time a lot of what that meant was all of the medicine without much of any of what you know what you want to sit down with. Yes. Are you serious. Yeah yeah sure. And it's actually gonna be hard for people understand it. You're gonna have to work be like Man this is writing.
- David Durham: 13:17 This is prose right. Yeah yeah yeah. So that that got me to my grad program. And through a couple of unpublished novels. Mm hmm. But in the years thereafter. I think what part of what happened was I read I began to read in a lot of genres that I had I had left behind for quite a number of years. And what my wife's family had a lot to do with this actually. So. OK.
- David Durham: 13:46 I go up first time up to her her parents house in rural Scotland. My wife's good friend right there. And you know it's this cottage kind of you know it's all I do like and you know Scottish stone fence. Yeah there's sheep all over the place and hedges and stuff. Oh it's better it's. Yeah. And they invite me in but you know it very very generously.
- David Durham: 14:16 And I end up by myself for a little bit in the study or the room with all the books basically. And I'm there and there's like a coal fire go in and a glass of wine I'm looking around on the bookshelf. And I was kind of perplexed because in my in the last ten years of my life all of my fiction had been very segregated which mostly meant there was literary fiction and there was kind of nothing else on my bookshelves on their bookshelves.
- David Durham: 14:52 And they went and got a floor to ceiling tons of books was just such a mixture of genres from very literary to comic sci fi and fantasy and crime so much crime in there. And it was almost like I was it wasn't computing in my brain how all these things fit together without being like you know over there. That's the crime here is that it was all together. It was like all story all all book and people were meant clearly meant to engage with it in different ways for different age ranges to be entertained and challenged.
- David Durham: 15:28 And it was all a mixture of that. That was super important for me and it helped me to begin to write stories that I think combined all the stuff I wanted to talk about thematically with an emphasis on telling a good story that people would want what

we're gonna want to be engaged with but that just opened your view like just opened a million doors. It did in so many ways. And I think I think it made me a better writer.

David Durham: 15:58

I could look I could read some crime fiction and discover the way that's that thing that they did really well here and I can learn from that from that Elmore Leonard novel or something and apply it to a really different story. And I can read this. I can I can be inspired by this fantasy in the science fiction. And that was that was really useful to pull out all that. So when you were starting Were you more interested in trying to impress as opposed to really. Realize I'm.

Jessi LeMay: 16:30

Ulysses I know. So I know why I talk about this and think about this all the time there is this idea of the story of who we think we're going to be. Yeah. And we tell ourselves that story over and over and over and over and that never is true that is never true. But it's so pervasive that it will keep us from seeing sort of other daughters. And so you have this moment because you were very open to your wife and her life and her family that it opened that door for you.

Jessi LeMay: 17:02

But I think about it all the time like you know the stories of who we tell about who we are. And certainly when we're younger because we're arrogant we you know we think we know that until we all learn that lesson. But I don't know. Yeah yeah yeah that was that was like me in high school. I uh I tried to read Ulysses in high school. I couldn't do it. I was very interested if something was long or if something was difficult. I was like All right this is a great book.

Everett George: 17:33

This summer that I got to tackle is out there how I need to learn to write this so I need to learn to do things like I like you know there was there was a was there was I I guess it's a common thing among it seems to be a common thing among young men. I really really liked Cormac McCarthy and I wanted to write like him especially in the western region. And so I wrote a paper for uh for my my senior year I wrote it for my English teacher and she was very she was very supportive of it she said.

Everett George: 18:07

She said hey this is this is all right. This is all right. And I reread it again it's very bad. But basically what she was saying she's like you're making an effort man you know like you're trying right now. And that meant the world to me. And yeah it's it's an interesting thing to be able to come out of that space where you're like All right. I want people to enjoy this. I want them to have a good time. I want them to see something of themselves in it as opposed to trying to decipher what I'm saying I want them to hear it plainly.

David Fenimore: 18:39

Yeah yeah. That's the point. Yeah. There seems to be some kind of a. I know it's a dichotomy or as a contrast or a conflict between the desire to entertain and the desire to teach you that you want to convey some sort of values some sort of feeling of community. But also you want to be popular. You want people to enjoy themselves. Yeah. People to escape a little bit from the humdrum of their daily lives. You know how how do you balance that. Is it something just entertaining.

Everett George: 19:10

You guys think something can just be entertaining or something can be just like well you free. Yeah. Yeah. Is there is there such a thing as that. Yeah. But do you like it. Well well OK. For instance. All right. I love like terrible terrible sci fi movies. Like what. Like I'm like Oh my God you know not like this fighter monsters no monsters nothing like that. There's something to me that's a purely entertaining. Yeah.

Jessi LeMay: 19:38

No offense anyone that I'm just saying like why indulge in that but I don't walk away with a greater lesson in life from it like. But there is something about it to me. Oh God I love it. You know I do. So yeah. But there are lessons in it right. Like every it seems

like every single thing no matter how simple it is it has a lesson as something good even if it's just like you know be a good guy. That some kind of lesson it seems to me like every kind of story has a lesson in it. Sure sure. But part of the plot I suppose. Yeah.

Everett George: 20:08

But and maybe some of it. Comes off campy. Yeah yeah yeah. Maybe that's it. It can seem overly sentimental or cheesy at this point. It's it's like I don't know. Yeah right. It could seem like you're just telling me something that I already know. And that's interesting. Like what we're worn down by. No way. Yeah. You like when you were talking about your your grandmother sort of expressing her true self and watching that. What I always think about it is like in stories.

Jessi LeMay: 20:39

People want to be heard. When they tell a story. Right. So like if someone's going to tell you their story they feel hurt. And that's like a human thing like we need to be heard but through and I work in nonfiction but through fiction you like indirectly give people that gift because you know maybe they didn't live the life of that character but they relate and so they sort of feel understood like I have that same emotion I relate to this character and maybe this character relate to me.

David Fenimore: 21:11

I don't know. It made me think about that. Can we talk about platforms for a minute. Now we've been we began with this image of indigenous people sitting around a campfire warning you know about the lion down by the stream. You know this oral storytelling pre technological or at least pre electronic technological pre print and all that. Do you guys write. David you write novels ever you write plays which are sort of embodied on stage by human beings based on texts.

David Fenimore: 21:44

Jesse you also work in video and photography. So what is the topic of this panel is the future of storytelling future visions of storytelling so what effect do you think that. Print technology video technology photography has on the telling of stories how houses changing what we mean by the word story so I just had this conversation with another photographer friend of mine. We are as a culture right now.

Jessi LeMay: 22:14

Most of what we view is on our smartphone and as a visual artist like 20 30 years ago a photograph had a tangible value to it. It was kind of laborious to create it on. You put sort of thought and all of that into it. And then when someone else saw it there was like an actual financial value to it as well. Today we have. And for better or worse I'm not making a judgment on it.

Jessi LeMay: 22:43

But now we have like Instagram for instance. And I always think about this because even when I'm looking on Instagram you will see image after image after image that is incredible and beautiful and amazing. But what is the value. Because I can just scan right past it something that 30 years ago I would have purchased. Now it's enough for me to see it for a millisecond and move on.

Jessi LeMay: 23:08

But what I think is that because we have so much content coming into our faces at all times the things that we pause on are narrative and story and so and you know there's content marketing and all of that really gets to the heart of that is that people that are viewing the content know in a millisecond whether they're being advertised to. And we don't want that. Get that out of our face.

Jessi LeMay: 23:37

But if you give them a story a narrative that makes them feel feel something will pause and we'll watch them. And so that's the future of storytelling for sure. And it's it's just alive right now. It is alive. We have so many ways to get stories and. We I mean I don't know if this is true but I thought I read like readership is up in actual

physical books people are reading like crazy. So I think that the more content we view the more savvy we are about what we like.

Jessi LeMay: 24:09

It has. Democratized both visual arts. And the written form. And so anybody can get into that. And I think that. I think that we're just like you know bingeing on it. I think it's huge. In terms of having some notion of what the future might be about things I'm always inclined to look back a bit and in relation to these different mediums as well. I mean I remember not so long ago.

David Durham: 24:40

With my first book contract stuff which I guess is kind of long ago like two thousand or so. You're going man. Yeah. I was happy just a wee boy when I read this. I. Like the notion of e-books. It was it was like I didn't care if the e-book rates on my contract. Because who wants an e-book. Who reads an e-book. And when does anyone ever gonna read an e-book. What are they going to read him on anyway. Like really it was it was a non thing.

David Durham: 25:09

Audiobooks were close to an on thing as was CD. Well yeah. Yeah. Well get used to you're younger than me clearly because I was back in the day when they were actually cassettes and they they're me with they're about that big and you know you're all a bit older. All right. I came in though. Yes exactly. And or they'd be abridged so many a bridge things. And it was just this medium that it again it wouldn't strike me as one as one that I could imagine when we're gonna get to a place where there is.

David Durham: 25:43

No audible or something when you're not even dealing with anything other than your device. When. And I I actually I don't know how much they account variations of of different forms in terms of use reading like I read a lot of stuff. Well that's not school related basically as audiobooks. And for me that works. I don't think Oliver Caitlin said that's shocking. It works.

David Durham: 26:12

I if I'm I'm reading an audiobook and I'm engaged and a cool scene happens I will remember that scene ever after and also in relation to where I was where I was walking on that hill when that thing happened when brand got. Pushed I know exactly where I was. Does the voice of the reader have some effect on this Amy as opposed to when you read off a page you're hearing the words in mind but when you're listening to an e-book or an audio book you're hearing a storyteller voice.

David Durham: 26:42

I don't love it. I don't like I don't welcome too much of a storytelling voice in that medium because I do think they should be translating the words without embellishing them. So if there's too much embellishment I'm inclined to to not engage us as much. I agree. I agree. It sort of lets it come you know when you're in it when you're you're lost in it it pulls you out because you're more you're paying attention to the actual production of it. Yeah.

David Durham: 27:12

And if there's a point to all that talking about these ancient forms of technology it's because I also don't know what's next. You know what is 30 years from now how we're gonna be consuming story. I do know and we all believe we all totally know this right that no matter what. As the mediums change and publishing you know I was scared at various times about different things happening no matter what we fundamentally need stories you know to be human beings that's never going to go away it's just you know we're gonna get different and maybe more right.

Jessi LeMay: 27:47

You know variety in the ways that gets. Disseminated to people. But the storytelling and creating stories always going to be there. If you would've told me even 10 years ago like when I really started first getting into podcasts listening which I'm just like an

obsessive podcast listener it's guided my career. But if you would have told me that I would listen to and be obsessed with fiction podcasts who feature huge actors and production value and all of that I would have never believed it.

Jessi LeMay: 28:20

I just didn't think that that would have been a form that like our culture would have accepted what they do. I mean you I mean every month there's a new fiction style podcast that I'm like. It's amazing you know. Isn't that just radio theater again. Yes. It's not crazy it's crazy. We never learn. That's it that's it. It's not even ironic. Yes it is. Yeah it just sounds cooler.

Everett George: 28:50

You know it just that's what's interesting about. Yeah. That's it's with audio books. When. When you read oh something a certain way you you have a tone in your head and you have a certain voice that the author is has. And it's really interesting with reading on your own and the way that people write you get so. You developed on you can get on the rhythm so you can hear them talking to you. And that's what sobered me about audio books is that a lot of the time they're read they're straight read.

Everett George: 29:19

It's like you know we walked over and then we sat down and it's just very present early. And the thing that I really like about books is that. It's just somebody talking to you. It's just somebody talking to you specifically. It's not a crowd. It's not Oh a bunch of people they are talking they know that you are reading it. So they are talking to you and there's a lot of value in that sort of directness. There's a lot of value in that sort of direct makes it. And as for the future of storytelling I don't I don't know as a as a I feel like us.

Everett George: 29:54

Of course I'm gonna say this and then natives are gonna be like oh I feel that way but I feel like as a Native Americans we're always like we're always on the edge. We always feel like we're on the edge of the world. We always feel like we're about to be cancelled at any moment like our voice or our voices. They're going to blast me. I don't believe I'm sorry guys. And it's just that's just there's a very there you were we're always on the edge of losing our voice completely because we're diminishing there's no more of us.

Everett George: 30:26

Once we're gone from here we're gone. So the interesting thing about what I do is I didn't realize this until like maybe three plays in is that I'm just doing what we used to do. I'm writing plays. I'm doing another form of oral storytelling and I'm doing another form of a story that we can do without any without any sign of sort of production or any sort of extra things we can do it with. We don't need paper we don't need batteries we don't need a screen we don't need a camera we can just present it as it is.

Everett George: 30:57

We can present it to each other when you talk to each other and that's not really true me. When I realize that it's like wow you know that's um I hope my ancestors like my sad stories. You know I hope they're like hey right. That's a good way. It seems to me you are recreating in a sense the original oral storytelling voice because every performance of one of your plays is a unique event at a particular time with particular people a particular audience in a particular place.

David Fenimore: 31:30

And unlike the mechanical reproduction of books and videos and photographs and all that you've got that sense of storytelling in the moment. They can create that sense of community. Yeah it's a beautiful idea but it's tough in practice. Nobody feels. I tell people hey I'm doing this play here. We're gonna do that this time. They say hey that's great. I'm going to be there. They're not there and it's really. And I'm giving in stereotypes here. But especially for the Native community.

Everett George: 32:00 Like if you tell them to be somewhere they're showing up 10 minutes later and with theater. It was tough for us to realize once it starts it starts. They're locking you out with every performance that I have. I got to be like Hey all right. So we're not ready yet. Because I got a text or somebody saying I'm on my way. I to stall everything time. All right. Let's get a couple more minutes give you a couple more minutes and I don't know. It's interesting because not many people will watch but it's not many people want to watch plays like I didn't think about plays before I started writing them.

Everett George: 32:32 I just I saw an ad and it said Hey we're gonna give you a stage if you write a story and I've always like writing stories and I've always always wanted to get my stories out there I just had no idea how. I never thought it was possible. So hey all right I'll just write this story. All right so of course I never had to play before I And never talked to actors before so I had Hannah and I had my brother and I had me. I said All right guys we're the actors. We're a theater group.

Everett George: 33:02 So we we just said All right we got it together we put it on and people liked it somehow. Like people people really liked it. They they they connected to it which I never expected because we had no natives in the audience. And what I wrote was just these three native kids on the rez dealing with their traumas and they connected with people. And I never expected that and I never thought it would happen and it did. And that's the crazy thing about stories is. Yeah.

Jessi LeMay: 33:31 Is is it satisfying in a way to have an audience of people that. Do not understand the native experience get to hear and learn that. Yeah or yeah it's do you feel like you were speaking to a particular audience. It depends on the. It depends on the subject it depends on the play.

Everett George: 33:50 My first one was about it was it was weird my first one was about I had written about OK so this is heavy but something that I realized that really scared me was that I didn't know anybody that hadn't been affected by like childhood abuse hadn't been affected by childhood specifically sexual abuse. And that scared me. That terrified me so much. Nobody that I knew did not have a direct connection. So I wrote about that.

Everett George: 34:20 I wrote about that and we talked about it and then that's the interesting thing about like native communities tightknit Native communities is that people came up to my mom and they told her well. I'm sorry that happened. I was dead and I felt so bad because it wasn't true it wasn't. It wasn't something that you like the whole thing wasn't like my biography but it had a terrible moment. So I had to I had to tell these people know my mom is a great mom.

Everett George: 34:49 This is this is you know to do this because she was able to support me but and then so it was cool to have people connect with that. It was cool that have people. It's sad but it like it was nice to have people be able to feel like kind of catharsis. And with our second one no one was rough no one was there because that one was more about who was talking. That one was the most like probably exclusively for my crowd that I wrote.

Everett George: 35:16 It was about these Native American kids that went out and tried to reenact the Ghost Dance and the Ghost Dance was something that. It was a dance to make all the white people go away. And so that the natives could reclaim their land. So we put that on and then it was silent. It was dead silent. People were uncomfortable. The actors were uncomfortable because it was just you know what he was reacting at all. And it was an older middle aged white crowd that were watching us and I kind of expected that.

- Everett George: 35:48 And well no I didn't expect it. I thought these people did love it. But no they didn't. Then people came up to me. They came up to me and then they said well you know you don't hate me do you. And it was like No I don't hate you. I don't hate you guys. So it just depends. It really depends on the material I guess it depends on how deep it is. It depends on why. I don't know. I can't really speak to the difference between a native audience and an audience that isn't native because we've never really had a native audience which is wild.
- Everett George: 36:22 What we did it at a high school once. Yeah we did. We did it at the Puma Lake High School once and they were very reactive. So that was beautiful. We got to we got to make kids laugh. There was wild wild. So we're going to go to your questions and comments in just a moment. I want to remind you too if you want to like react give us some evaluations let us know what you are. Go to Menti.com and there's a code up there on these on these cards and you can let us know what you're doing and what you think.
- David Fenimore: 36:50 We're finished with one quick question everybody could take about 20 seconds to answer this. The Kiowa storyteller Scott Mom today was a Truckee Meadows Community College maybe like 10 years ago or so. And he said something that always stuck with me. He said I'm not really Jeep voice he has. He said there is only I believe one story in the world and that is a person goes out and sees something and then comes back and tells the others about it.
- David Fenimore: 37:19 So do you think that that all stories sort of distill down to a small number or a single archetypal story or are there by definition just as many different stories as there are human beings. What start with whatever it now we'll go to David and Jessie. OK. I think that we at a certain point we all have the same kind of story of the same kind of things. But there's certain I don't know about every single story.
- Everett George: 37:49 I think as a group as a people we tell similar stories but individually we all got our own things like the whole Ulysses. What is Ulysses about. I don't know. I try to read it later but that's you know that's something that a lot of people connect with. So it's it's it's all in the presentation it's all in how people relate to it. But yeah I do believe that we as a human group as a fundamental group we do tell the same stories. We do believe in a lot of the same things because we're we're the same. You know we're we're humans and we're made that way into the world of it.
- David Durham: 38:20 All right 20 seconds. I suspect I wouldn't say there's just one but probably a pretty small handful. Yeah. You got different stories. It's funny but with that quote because it may I thought. You know what. That's kind of like a shorthand version of my first published novel like the one that didn't get published. Where about all the issues. But the one that did get published was the one where the where the person goes out experiences stuff and comes back.
- Jessi LeMay: 38:50 So maybe there's something to that. Yeah. Yes. So I think that we crave a very specific storytelling. You know and we all learn this with rising action and resolution and that kind of thing. But I think the one thing that every single story told since the dawn of time that sort of follows that format that we crave is this moment where the protagonist seeks to answer a question. So what is that question. So will I or will I get the random word over whatever right.
- Jessi LeMay: 39:23 Or will I. Right. There's a question. And the majority of the plot is seeking to answer that question. So I would say yes. And then you know from there the sky's the limit. And asking questions in general like you talked about entertaining Erik educating. But I think so much good writing good storytelling is about. Exploring things that we don't

quite have a grip on yet. Yeah. The process of working through those things in story maybe helps us gain some understanding. That's a beautiful part. Yeah.

David Durham: 39:53

Yeah absolutely. That's beauty. Yeah so I like to open it up to our audience. Those of you who were brave enough to come here tonight we're gonna quiz questions comments there's one over there. We have you have the mike so much good. Mic. Yeah. Stephen. Thank you for this conversation I really loved listening to all of you Everette kind of touched on this question already but I'd love to hear more of Everette on this question. I'd like to hear all of you talk about who you write for seat. You all spoke a good deal about audience tonight and I was wondering how you imagine who that audience is.

Everett George: 40:26

Is it yourself. Is it a specific person in your life. Is it a community. Yeah like I said that thing with my grandma a long time ago. I decided I want to write for people like my grandma. I want to write for people that don't necessarily read or don't explore stories I want to give them something that they can see themselves and I want to give them something so that they can start. I want I want. I want to inspire other people to start I want to write things for people that don't think that they can do it like we is especially important right now because I wish I would get it.

Everett George: 40:59

I will give you shelter right now and there's these kids that they they're they're going through tough times right now they're there they're there and like the foster system and they're trying to figure things out and I want them to know that they can do important things I want them to know that they're capable of doing it. I want them to know that it again. It doesn't have to be this big complicated thing that you can't get a grip on if you want to tell a story. You can just tell a story. You can just make it how you want it to be. That's because that's good.

Everett George: 41:29

And the cool thing is that if it means something to you if it's honest to you it's going to be honest to somebody else. And it's that it's it's really that simple which is it's it's truly you know specifically my interest is in telling the stories of my community. So this community is my audience because I'm I am just deeply and interested in this idea of like what does it mean to grow up grow up Weston and what does it mean to grow up in this community and how does that you know has it build up your place identity so that there's that but also do.

Jessi LeMay: 42:02

I was going to say this earlier I think it's really really interesting how you know an audience will sit in front of a storyteller someone that may not be an experienced storyteller at all. Who is just telling this honest moment in their life. And it is so wonderful to see a community a roomful of people who sort of embrace that. And there's no judgment. And even someone that's very nervous and their voice is very quirky.

Jessi LeMay: 42:30

The room sort of embraces them by leaning forward and leaning in and and listening and it's this really magical moment. I think that you know again like we've done for all of time but. Yeah. So I think that is what drives me. Because that to me is. Like real community building. Seeing that in action sounds more more questions comments. So I'm like an aspiring writer I had like a passion for writing since like middle school.

Audience Member #2:
43:00

What would you say was like the one thing in your life that. You're like this is what I wanted right. Well I OK. So I'm aware like in my my fiction workshop I recently had a lot of stories that kind of seem to come out out of the world of DMD which has you know it's a mixed bag really. But in my own experience back when AT&T was cool I played a lot and I tended to be the dungeon master and a lot of that was actually not

so much following the modules that I supposed to but having read more fantasy than my friends.

David Durham: 43:36

So I could like steal lots of stuff from different books and then even into other stories for them. And in a way I feel like that's the first time I was super engaged with being a storyteller that fed into being aware again as a young person that I would often get a story in my head and it would live there and I know for a week or two I'd almost like write it into my head not on paper just in my head and it would fade away and eventually there'd be another story that come up and that would occupy my brain. It's kind of like my brain always needed a story occupying it.

David Durham: 44:04

And at some point there was a transition as an undergrad where I said I'm going to start writing some of these down so that when I'm done with it it still exists and I can go back to it later. OK talk about early early writing that you see again later. I had a humbling experience but I enjoy having in my workshop I'm teaching now that kind of advanced fiction workshop. Before we began workshoping student stories I gave them an anonymous story for them to critique like you know you got to go through the process and it was of course a story that I'd written when I was the exact same age which you know back in the day I thought was awesome and I didn't tell him it was me and some of them figured it out pretty quickly but I kind of sat there as they did the workshop and I think that's a good point.

Jessi LeMay: 44:45

Who is that. I don't know if that's off the topic or not but can I build on that a little bit please do as a visual artist and when I started the focus the more the whole reason I started the film I was really selfish you know like first of all I love like podcasts like The Moth and I wanted to hear stories from my community but I really did it. So that would force myself to create short short documentary films and to just force myself to have a deadline and show it. And can I tell you how much of that work is just shit. You know it's just awful. But you have to force yourself to get over.

Jessi LeMay: 45:17

Failure because the only way that will truly only way you're ever just going to build and get better at what you do is just seeing yourself fail over and over. It's so humbling. But it's kind of freeing and just to be like I don't care. Maybe this is crap. Somebody help me out. Tell me Tell me how I can improve on this and so I would just be like like run full on into that and be Do not be scared to produce shit. Do not be scared about it.

David Durham: 45:43

So the short answer to that question actually there is a short answer and it is that when I realized that I was never gonna stop having those stories I want to play out in my head it's like what else you got to do but put them down and hope that they find a readership and that that helps you do more of the same thing thereafter. Like sometimes when people talk about you I want to write a novel but they've never written anything like you don't need to write a novel like if you if you're not always doing it and always really craving it.

David Durham: 46:13

It's it's probably not the thing that casually saying I wanna write a novel but I'm too busy or I want to write a novel what I don't read. You hear that a lot. As a novelist. So that's the thing that seems so important about it is just that it's something that you can't let go of. And others tell you if you write you're a writer like nobody is going to. Nobody has a right to tell you you're not a writer nobody is going to be like No you you're not a writer you're doing it you're doing it. It's that simple. If you're right you're right or you're already on your way. And really whatever inspired you to do it.

Everett George: 46:43

That's that's fine. That's what you're supposed to do if you feel a kind of spark you're supposed to do it. I've been writing since I was I can't remember a time when I wasn't

and I knew that I was going to stick with it when I wrote something for my brother. He was in he was in the hospital through some form. There's a story I would give it to him give it to him. He came back you recover and then I was working on it again. I wonder to spend it. It was on this old computer I was gonna did my grandma's house next year I came back to rework it again and my brother and my cousin they said hey can you like read to us what you're written.

Everett George: 47:14

And I was nervous about it. I was gonna read it. I was like OK. And so I looked at it and I opened it up and they had read it and they had torn through it. They like made fun of the whole thing. When that happened as soon as that happened I knew for a fact. I think I was like nine. I was like OK this is the worst this is ever we're gonna feel it it goes right right. Right. This is a crossroads right now. This doesn't stop me. Then I'm going to keep going. And it didn't. And it didn't. So yeah if you just do it then you're doing it.

Audience Member #3:
47:45

It's that it's that simple it's a cool look and you'll change you'll change other comments. Questions so some have to hear. So since the team is the future of storytelling I don't know if you guys have seen GP T2 or similar programs but there are already kind of generative algorithms you can give them. You know a few words and they'll spit out a story and it'll typically be kind of nonsensical and you can tell a human didn't right. I don't make a little bit of sense and I'm just curious.

Audience Member #3:
48:13

What do you think will happen and how shall we value stories if in the future. You know a computer program can write a story that's indistinguishable from what a human can write. Or what if a computer can pump out a million hamlets a minute when a human's struggles to write even one Hamlet. And to clarify I'm not asking do you think that will happen. Just what would it what would it be like and how shall we value stories if it did happen. Well what that makes me think is that OK. Did the computer write it or did the person who made the computer write it.

Jessi LeMay: 48:43

Can that be credited to them because they made the programming they made the computer. So what was it kind of reminds me of like when I was saying how I like those like cheesy sci fi movies on the Sci Fi Channel right. But I think that maybe I think it will even be that long before computers will generate that kind of story but they will never never be able to write stories about like the true deep human experience. I just think that's not possible. And when they can I think we're all in trouble.

Audience Member #4:
49:13

If a computer feels lonely that's scary. Are there other questions. I know it's like to be an artist. That's weird to say I've started to own it now but there is one part that I'm still trying to understand and wondering if it's with other artists too is like when you write something or do something in your medium and you're you really love it and you've really poured a part of yourself into it and it is not received as greatly as you had hoped. How do you cope with that.

Jessi LeMay: 49:43

Because I feel like it's a type of grieving but like what do you do about that. You agree that like you have to be able to sit with that and be like. Like I failed at that. But that I think I just really feel like sitting in and owning that. Is the only way you're gonna get better and maybe you still are like you know effort. That was good. I stand by that. I love that. And that's fine. And you can have that feeling too. I just. I'm big on that I like being able to sit with your failure.

Everett George: 50:15

Yeah usually when that happens I just think I said it. I think I'm like man so. But then. And then I'll think though for a really long time. And then later I'll go back to it and then I'll be like Nah it's alright. It can be better but it's not bad. You could think of

yourself as being ahead of your time. Yeah. Or maybe everyone else is behind you. You understand. If I could spin it in a slightly more positive direction.

David Durham: 50:42

So I wrote the novel about the the kid goes out and comes back and it got published and the very first time it was going to be reviewed there were pre publication reviews that were really good. But the first mainstream press it was but the Washington Post. It was it was like three days before the book was to come out. I get this review. This dude hates it and he hated it. And like all the ways and I mean I think there was language in there that I remember being to the effect of this book was a mistake. The author is gonna know it soon and the publisher is gonna know it soon.

David Durham: 51:14

J I know his name. He's like I know you before you know you. Yeah I remember exactly where I read that it was in the yellow house and in the toilet. Anyway that's where the thing is the thing is and this is something I tell you people that students who have a novel out and they're getting rejected by agent after agent and they kind of go on I've been doing this for a long time and there's all the rejections not everyone's gonna receive it the same way. What matters is when you connect you begin to connect with people who do see what you do.

David Durham: 51:46

So that same book the next the next review was in the US in USA Today and I went. I remember you're an impressive man used to be. I drove out to the convenience store got my USA Today and sat there you know read it in the car and it was awesome. It was great. It was you know the first of a lot of really great great reviews. It's the same book totally different reaction and in that case it wasn't as if I needed to rewrite the book.

David Durham: 52:15

But often in a way it's not because of those students of I know I've had who have spent a number of years being rejected by all these agents then. Several times I think there's been an experience where they get it to the right person that person sees what's actually there get excited about it convinces other people to see what's actually there and then it's in print. And you know there was there's that notion of putting something out there and not being received well maybe means you have to like rethink do it again write the next book that the play the next poem whatever but also you also need to look for the next reader as well.

Audience Member #5:
52:52

I don't miss my beliefs that all good stories have a strong sense of place and in the yellow house in the bathroom is a great great beginning for a story. We have time for one more question comments in the back there maybe or wherever the overwhelming response. I wanted to ask if kind of seeking a value or seeking a benefit in storytelling does that then cheapen the meaning of storytelling is it not ok to just tell a story and enjoy it like earlier in the discussion we were talking about seeking and the discussion about e-books and the transition so we're talking about e-books and the transition and why that matters.

Audience Member #5:
53:31

There's definitely a discussion of monetary benefit there. Of people buying books and people reading books and how readership is going up but like we tell stories in our everyday life to our family members who are friends and I don't think it needs to be measured that kind of benefit. What are your thoughts on that. I think as artists there is this imperative for us to feed ourselves. And so we are doing we are focused in a way on like what is the value in that.

Jessi LeMay: 54:01

But as someone that works in communities in the community and storytelling like none of my storytellers receive any financial compensation for their stories they're really there for that kind of engagement. And I would just say like you know one of the things I work on a lot as a professional is telling the stories of families and I do like

family documentaries and oral histories and then teaching families like go home and turn on your smartphone and get your grandmother's story because time is of the essence.

Jessi LeMay: 54:31

Like those stories will go away. And when that person leaves this world she or he will take with them the stories that were told to them. So if you are not documenting that stuff I mean that's gone. So that's the real value is you know who are we. Who. Who is our family. Where do we come from. Who are we as a people and so yeah you got to keep telling those stories and you have to be willing to like sit and listen to other people's stories.

Audience Member #6:
55:00

And anyway that's the value we have time for one more question maybe I'm not from Reno and stay and face all this email I got I might not stay here for much longer but no I'm just wondering are we talking about community and how story builds that. And I was just wondering if you have any recommendations for books about it like the Reno community or its history maybe Robert Laxalt sweet promise land is a good one. Yeah.

David Fenimore: 55:25

The best the Basque heritage here Robert Laxalt sweet promised land and Walter Van Tilburg Clark City of trembling leaves which is about Reno in the 30s and 40s. Well I think we have to call it a evening here. I'd like to thank you all for braving the current situation to come on out here. This is ground zero right here. There's some there's still some food left. Feel free to finish it up please please go to Menti.com if you haven't already and enter this code and you can make comments and let us know who you are.

David Fenimore: 56:00

We'd like to thank the Core Humanities all our staff that makes this possible. We'd like to thank Laughing Planet, Tim Healion, our host. The next Thought on Tap event, news, views, and brews takes place Thursday, March 26, and we'll be talking about Future Visions of Food and Culture with Dr. Bretton Rodriguez will be the moderator for that event. So come on by. Thank you everyone for participating and stick around and we can continue the conversation.