Remember Love Transcript

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Description: Transcript of a podcast of the discussion of the book, Remember Love between author, Jody Lisberger of gender of women’s studies and Debra Valencia-Laver of psychology and child development.

[Music]

Karen Lauritsen (Moderator): [Background Music] Welcome to Conversations with Cal Poly Authors. This episode was recorded on February 7th 2014 at the Robert E. Kennedy Library at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. It features Jody Lisberger and Debra Valencia-Laver discussing Lisberger’s book Remember Love, a collection of short stories that was published by Fleur-de-Lis Press in 2008. Jody Lisberger is the Susan Currier Visiting Professorship for Teaching Excellence at Cal Poly for 2013-2014. She's also the director and associate professor of gender and women studies at the University of Rhode Island and part of the fiction faculty at Spalding University Brief Residency MFA and Writing Program. Jody is joined in conversation by Debra Valencia-Laver, an Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts, and a professor in the Psychology and Child Development Department at Cal Poly. This podcast features Jody reading from Remember Love, as well as explorations around the writing and publishing process, the intersections of reality and fiction, and what it means to be committed to the truth. [Music]

[Applause]

JL: Thank you everyone for coming and thank you Cal Poly for phenomenal supporters, I have no interest of going home. [Laughter] Congratulations to the library for your prize. It's really an extraordinary library. And I'm very honored to be part of this series and part of Cal Poly, and to be part of the writing community here. I look out and see many writers. So thank you very much for coming. I thought I would talk a little bit about how my book came about and maybe share a few excerpts that answers a question that people often have which is, "How do you write stories? Where the stories come from?" Let me begin by saying I got a very late start as a writer. I really didn't start writing until I was about 45 which seems very late to me. I wish someone in, at the university level had encouraged me way earlier. Even when I went and did a PhD in English, I always said that I wanted to write the books, not about the books. It just took me a while. So, for those of you who are undergraduates, I was an anthropology major. I taught high school English. I went into the masters in English. And then I worked as a journalist, an editor, a grant writer, I also did a PhD in English, and slowly found my way into writing fiction. This book has an interesting story I suppose behind it. One of the stories that was published earlier is a story called "Bush Beating" and I'll talk a little bit more about it. But I'll tell you the story as a cautionary tale. A very, very high powered important agent in New York saw the story. Agents frequently scan literary journals and contact people directly. And he thought it
was great story, "Bush Beating", yet painful such that it is, but he thought it was a great story, and he called me. Imagine, an agent calling you, and asked me, what I—did I have more stories, yes, would I send them? So I sent them, and I had a good 10 stories. And he liked them, but he said to me, "We can't sell stories that aren't connected. Could you take your stories and rewrite them so that they're all connected to Sheila and Julia," who are the main characters in the first story. Of course, I wanted to have a big named agent, take me on. And so I did the very stupid thing of spending two years rewriting my collection so that the stories would all be what's called linked. It's a long time to spend doing that. I sent him the stories then, we kept up our contact and he liked them but he had decided at that point that he didn't want the collection. So, that discouraged me immensely, but that is a cautionary tale. And I'm very glad he didn't want them because what I did is spend another two or three years rewriting the collection so that it was the way that I wanted it to be. And I felt very much as if he was asking me to tame or domesticate my collection in a way that I hadn’t envisioned. So the cautionary tale to writers is yes, listen to your editors but also think about your vision of what it is you want to be writing in the first place. For me, I envisioned these stories as sort of tribute to Joyce, which is not to flatter myself but just to set the high bar. And I saw that I would have three stories that would be more or less about younger people, three stories about middle age, and three stories about older people or thereabouts. And so I took the collection back into my own hands. Now, sometimes people wonder where stories come from, and I'm always a little bit puzzled by the disclaimer on the page that says this is fiction, this is—these are made up because—but for me, by definition, it is fiction. But of course, I teach in an MFA and writing program as well and I teach people how to write stories or how to write novels. And I—they often say to me, "I don't know what to write story about, what should I write the story about." So, I will say to them for instance, "Write a story about something that really matters to you today, right now, what really matters to you." So I might say for instance, this story of "Bush Beating" which if you've read it is not a pretty story. It was inspired for me by some boys who played outside my house. I raise girls, so I'm fairly clueless about boys. But they are just as cruel to each other as girls are at the age of 12 and 13, and one of them was nicknamed "The Whore". And I thought this was terrible. And they would, he would pick on people and they would pick on him, and so I said to myself, for the story, "Oh, this is, was piece of it. Imagine what it would be like to be the best friend, the parents of the best friend of The Whore." And that's what took me. But what really took me was this thinking what mattered to me today? What mattered to me today? On that particular day was the way a hawk circled in the sky. That the way that the free flowing, soaring that a hawk might have. And also, that I had only in my mid 40s learned the very valuable little bit of information which is the bird's bones are hollow, did you know that? See, Maggie [assumed spelling], you're learning for the first time. So, what, where does that go for a writer? Because I think we as writers are often like quilters. We're talking a little fragrant, a little piece of our grandmother's slip and stitching it into the bigger fabric. So in a way, it becomes a historical marker, it becomes a memento. But the rest that goes around it is fabricated because we're lying. I teach creative nonfiction but I write fiction because I always to my say my students that I prefer to lie rather than tell the truth. So how does that focus on a hawk or on this notion of being weightless translate into a story. "Bush Beating" opens like this. "'You shouldn't lie about eagles', Agnes thinks. 'So admit it was the hawk,' she says, 'the red tailed hawk high in the crook of the dead oak tree. Come on now, it's that what you saw?' Agnes leans
forward in her chair speaking toward her son's ear as if she were pouring a thin stream of water between him and her. 'To say it was the hawk and you'll be free,' she wishes. Phillip stays hunched pushing his lower back into the wooden spindles of the kitchen chair until he can feel each knob. He clamps his teeth and stares into his clutched chubby hands, fingers interlaced compressing first one row of knuckles than the other. He thinks about the hard white cartilage that caps each of the bones, how if you chew the end of the chicken bone, the cartilage will pop off and you suck marrow. But eagle bones are different, hallow. His mother once said to him, 'How else do you think the bird flies?' Philip likes the idea of flying like that. His own body is so heavy." So there's that little piece of something. So, I'll share two other little pieces and then I'll turn and let Debra ask me some questions and I certainly hope you'll have questions later too. A prize winning story of mine was called "In the Mercy of Water". It's about two girls jumping off of railroad bridges. And sometimes, people learn that I'm from Ithaca, New York. Now, to Californians that maybe a nonentity. But that's where Cornell University is, and that's where the land was heavily glaciated, that's why you've got the Finger Lakes that are there, in the middle of New York State. And they're gorgeous, very serious gorgeous with suspension bridges and other bridges. And I'm sad to report that one of the things that happens in Ithaca is students commit suicide jumping off those bridges. So people read my story and they learn that I'm from Ithaca, New York, and they say, "Wow Jody, you've got those girls jumping off of bridges? You must be amazing jumping off bridges." And I say to them, "Are you kidding? I would never jump off a bridge." But I did for instance, once go to water country which must, there must be the equivalent of some huge water slides out here, out west. And I went on a fairly momentous day when I knew I needed to be doing things a little differently. And I have a rebuilt right knee. So the thought of getting in an inner tube and going down slides is not exactly something I do. And I think my life has been thrilling in enough other ways that I'm not somebody who's going to be jumping out of airplanes and waiting for a parachute to open. But I thought there was one ride that maybe is familiar to the rest for you, it's called Geronimo, and they were eight-year-olds doing it. I was terrified. You walk up three levels, three stories. So, you're O.K., that's only a two story building over there, so go on another story, and you're not in inner tube, this is a free flowing ride where you lie down, you have your bathing suit on fortunately or maybe not fortunately. And you put your hands over and they tell, you lie flat, and the people who are monitoring this push you along a shoot and they tell you to put your hands over your breast so they're still there when you get to the bottom. And you free fall over the edge and you're supposed to yell Geronimo, and then you get down to the bottom and your bathing suit is wedged so deeply into your crack, all right that you need dental floss to take it out. So I have this story called "In the Mercy of Water" which is about jumping off of bridges. And as you might imagine, it happens a little bit like this. "The first time I see Annabelle jump from Siemens' bridge, she looks like a sliver in the air, a splinter of falling light. It isn't just her long legs outstretched, locked at the ankles, toes pointed toward the water that make her look sharp and invincible. Or the evening summer sun that lights up the whole side of her body that her bony arms press skyward as if in prayer. Not that she wants us to think she's asking for something not Annabelle never asked, merely perceived. Even as she prepares to jump, she makes certain to look as if she was simply responding to Billy's instructions. 'Jump way out beyond the rocks in the broken branches, see them?' Together, they peer over the edge of the railroad bridge 40 feet down in to the gorge. Billy keeps a foot on the rail to feel the vibration,
he says just in case. 'One last thing', he adds, still out of breathe from his own leap, he points to the ragged timbers jutting from the abutment. 'You got to jump like you mean it, straight and clean, yeah?' He touches a hand at her shoulder. 'Damn you for listening to him,' I want to call out to her, 'And damn you Billy for telling her to do it.' But I only watched as Annabelle curls her toes over the edge of the trestle, crouches and without so much as glance toward me, thrust fold her arms and leaps howling not Geronimo, but 'Oh shit', as she goes down a knife into the dark pool. "All right. So you know what I said on my way down [laughter]. And then at the end of the water—end of the story "In the Mercy of Water", "In the Mercy of Water", she and another girl in fact do go and jump off a bridge, which is again something you will never see me do. And of course, it's very, very serious. "'Hey,' Annabelle says resting her hand to my shoulder, does she feel the shaking? She points down into the gorge. 'You don't have to jump out far here, just straight down, O.K.?" I nod, still staring over the edge into the sheen so black and tawed, it gives the illusion of stillness, of safety. 'But first you have to let go of the trust,' she says, then she chuckles. 'But oh la, la what a suit to wear', she runs her finger along my bikini bottom, 'It'll wedge so tight between your cheeks, even floss won't pull it out, won't that be something,' she laughs, meaning for me to laugh too." So there these little gems that we take from our life experience, and if I were to read just one other little gem, just a short paragraph because I know you all have wondered about this a lot. I have a story called love—"Local Warming". It's about a masseuse, I'm not a masseuse but I have had massages and I loved massages. And here's a little something that makes its way into my story, the story isn't about me, but it makes my way into my story because it's my consciousness here that's playing out a rumination that maybe I've had. So for instance in this story, "Every Thursday, Sarah gives herself a gift of an afternoon to futz. T.G.I.F. she calls it, Thank God I Futz. Always glad to be a day ahead of everybody else. Now, if only Carla Pedro [assumed spelling] would hurry up and get dressed. Sarah sighs, thumbing her fingers on the desk, Carly always takes longer to reappear than anyone else. No wonder. Silk panties, laced bra with under wire, Evan-Picone nylons, full body slip, pearl earrings, pearl necklace to match, gold watch, all stocked up nicely on the chair like a little pyramid, one of the seven wonders. Do her clients even realize she notices all the little things about them? She understands completely what the piles are about, the illusion, the reassurance that you can put yourself together one layer at a time. She knows exactly what her clients face after she leaves the room, how they pull themselves in the days from the table. Stare in the mirror at the red blotch across their foreheads from the headdress, what do they boss say? And then at their bodies, sagging breast, tight buns, flabby legs, blue veins, it doesn't much matter. They all sigh when they gaze at their pile of belongings. Can they pull themselves together in so short of time? They'd so much rather get back on the table and lie there forever." So that is to start us off, you get to hear a little bit of my voice. I think people think I'm so serious, especially my students. But I hope you can appreciate that there's a lot of play. I'm having a good time, I'm laughing at myself mostly in writing those stories. So thank you for listening to that introduction.

[Applause]

DVL: So again, it's such a pleasure to be talking with you about these and we'd talked a little bit about some of them. But again, just again to be able to share this with all of you and I
appreciate the opportunity to be here. Again, one of things that really struck me about all of the stories was just some of the language that you used. You kind of suggest these aren't really like happy stories, there's a lot of real emotional depth, there's a maturity, there's a scariness about some of the things that you talked about. And but I again, like you say, every now and then there's humor. So for example, in that first story, the "Crucible", I mean I was kind of thinking like, you know, maybe it's kinda of funny that, the guy that she had an affair with was the person who checks the quality of the air in the house. And, you know, that with another, in another story that could be kind of really hilarious [laughter] kind of thing. But of course, people who check radon stuff, they have affairs too and it's serious to them too. So you're kind of thinking about that also. You know, there's situations and I can go fish and points of distraction where again there are kind of these humorous elements. And I guess my question is how do you decide on the tone of the stories? Because in the—again, in general, these tend to be serious, even in those stories are very serious element, how do you decide on that tone?

JL: Oh boy. I think for me when I'm thinking about—I'm not thinking so much about tone as I'm thinking about—I'm just writing, I'm thinking more about how seriousness needs to be broken up with some levity, right? So that we can't all have forever something that is serious and urgent, we simply can't sustain that in our lives. And that it is the play between seriousness and humor that is crucial. We have to give our readers and ourselves, I mean in our lives and in our writing this moment to come up and laugh at it all. So I don't think it's so much a decision early on for me about the tone that I take. I'm just thinking about whose story is it? What do they want? I suppose I have in so far as we always—we can easily recognize different writers by their prose style and their language. I probably have a signature style that people recognize. I'm sure you all could hear it there. I think it's in the revising or it's also in our sympathetic compassionate view of our characters worlds that we can bring in for consideration also those moments of humor. That's part of our ability to live the lie [laughter] is that we can, you know, I can sit on a bus in Rhode Island and hear a woman talk, talk, talk, talk, talk to the bus driver and then say she makes a lasagna that would kill a horse and laugh. And I say to myself now is that good or bad to make a lasagna that kills a horse, [laughter] right? So we see these funny things happening everywhere. I mean I was at the dentist yesterday and there was a woman there, who clearly has had several—an older woman—surgery, jaw surgery, and yeah she's there with her walker and she comes out of bathroom, and she can't get her pants done up. And the dentist office is totally flummox because they don't know who to help her to get her pants done up. Because the guy dentist can't help her right, you have to call it, and the whole scene is terrible but also in some ways funny. So I try to capture both of these.

DVL: So, you know, actually by the time I got to the story "In the Mercy of Water" which is only the third story in the book, I was a little bit terrified [laughter] to read about these people who are going to jump off the bridge. So what the first story is about, is about infidelity and that's just, you know, one piece of it, I think there was some really lovely pieces in the "Crucible" that, I as mom and thinking about, you know—so one of the scenes in that is the mother and the father are watching their daughter perform the play "The Crucible" and just all of the emotions that go into it as they also kind of thinking about, you know, when they're going to tell her that they're going to be separating and everything because of the mother's infidelity and so, you
know, I'm kind of like that's kind of heavy. And then "Bush Beating" is really, you know, like we're saying, I mean that's, you know, that child, the best friend of the child whose called The Whore. And kind of things that this—that young man, is kind of in a sense moved into because of who this friend is and everything and there's a rape in that story too. And so I'm going with those, they're going to fall off the—you know, kill themselves or something so I was like really, really relieved [laughter] I was relieved when they come—I kind of at the end, when they're like, you know, yelling hallelujah and happy because they survived jumping off the bridge. I kind of have that feeling too [laughter]. So anyway but, so again, one of the things that I thought was really interesting about that first set of the stories were you're talking about young people, and you're talking about their sexuality and you're talking about in the very frank ways. How did—I mean though—how comfortable were you with, you know, talking about not in writing about that and then I think another piece that comes up in several of your stories says, is the topic of homophobia. And, you know, parents within those first couple of stories being concerned about their child's, you know—are their children gay or lesbian, and rejecting them or, you know, trying to figure that out so you would maybe talk about those two things about the sexuality and homophobia a little bit, O.K.

JL: Why thank you. In my goal of setting out to write three stories about adolescence. One of the things that I was trying to do is first of all stay true to the angst of adolescence. So I've raised two daughters they have now had their own children remarkable so that seems, and we learn a lot from raising children. So we know their angst. My children were never in Crucible. Sometimes people wonder about that. No, they never acted in Crucible. But that whole question for parents—so adolescents enjoy reading stories, college students enjoy reading them, and also grownups. Because the whole story of our children's sexuality even to see them start to manifest some form of sexuality, and the joke of sitting outside your door with the baseball bat that kind of thing, that's a joke but instead in jest, they're often meant in truth, right? And so I think that, when I'm writing a story I'm not, it's not Jody Lisberger, who is the character or whose writing the story, I'm putting myself into the head of the—mentally of a person who is not me. Now, so, and there's a sexual assault in "Bush Beating" but not actually a rape. So how does one distinguish one or the other? In any case it's a close call. The, when we write unlike what advertisers do today in the media, there is no air brushing. If as a writer one finds oneself, I feel shying away from something and one proceeds to shy away we're in trouble. Because I think our pact with readers as writers, we're not journalists, we're not guidance counselors, we're not principals of school, whatever is that we're going into the idiosyncrasies and the truth of human character. Now my concerns about sexuality, about homophobia are I suppose a little bit unusual. I will share with you that, I had a twin sister who died when she was 34 and she was gay, and I'm straight. I will share with you that was a D.E.S. cancer, my mother was one of millions of women in the late 40s, early 50s who were given a drug synthetic estrogen called Diethylstilbestrol supposedly to prevent miscarriage even though they knew that it caused cancer. And I have an article written about it, if you ever want to read it. And in the deposition because my twin did sue the drug companies before she died, she won her case. They tried, so I was depose because I'm the twin, all right. I will share with you that was a D.E.S. and why didn't I have cancer as well. And the drug companies took a very hard stand and tried to argue that because my twin was gay, she had cancer and because I was straight I
didn't. So in any case that's a kind of story that stays with you. I because my twin had been gay when my children we're growing up in high school, junior high and high school, I was probably more a tuned to conversations or concerns or kids, who to me manifested as having alternative sexuality or finding their way, or whatever it was. And I was puzzled also by the fact that so many of the fathers I knew, never talked about their concern that their children would be gay, which is not that they're going to love them less, but that they're worried about Matthew Shepard and what's going to happen, and women, mothers occasionally talk about it. But so part of my concern comes in my stories, that that's a piece of who I am as I writer, is to try to bring out these moments where there's such homophobia and we might go, wow, why is that there? I mean the couple, the married couple in "Bush Beating", Agnes—they're both, they're really—they're strange people but it's partly because they don't talk about certain things. So I think ultimately in this in this story and a reviewer when it reviewed once said, this story should—this collection shouldn't be called Remember Love it should be called Love Forget About It [laughter] as in the long version of forget about it. And to which I responded, yes, but these are women in particular, who are deciding that they aren't gonna settle for less than love.

And that's going to be a love in a relationship that recognizes their own autonomy, their own desire, and things like that. So part of this comes from what—and we can look at it in scholarship though I really push that away when I'm writing in real life, what people cannot talk about? So we know in fiction actually is that there're really two pieces to fiction, one is that we call the scene, you can see that there's a trajectory S C E N E, the scene, which is also the seen, S E E N, AJ Verdelle passed that along to me, that homonym that looks so obvious to me now. But that's what we see in the visible part, what creates dramatic tension in the story is the unseen. And the unseen is what people don't talk about, that's what people think but don't say. And I—when I'm teaching people how to write fiction for instance or even creative nonfiction moving from the scene to the unseen is very important, because that's, it's the clashing that seem pinching of the unseen on the scene, which is where we get dramatic tension and being only black marks on the page, all right, right totally arbitrary that we need anything. My job as a writer is to animate the page and it's not going to happen, unless I make it happen. So it's the clash of what is seen, what is visible and what is not talked about, not visible that creates that tension in this story.

DVL: Actually talking about the title stories that's interesting because of course the picture doesn't come from the title story, the picture comes from the last story, but the title comes from "the title story". And I thought one of the things that was interesting about that's story was, in your first descriptions there's a lot of talk about fingers, O.K. and Mark is the character, yes?

JL: Yes

DVL: So Mark's fingers and considering what happens later in the story, was that a conscious decision? And did that happen—I mean, when you wrote the story, did it happen in a linear way or did you go back in and fill that in, or again talk about that as in how you develop that with maybe with that story?
JL: Yeah, that's a great question. I think about Sherwood Anderson and his fascination with hands. I actually have—I love hands, I'm fascinated with hands, I worked as an apprentice auto mechanic, I was a potter, my father died when I was young, I did a lot of manual things on somebody whose often been in formal settings that going to have to get out, and do something with my hands. So I think hands are really important an might I say, in Remember Love there's an issue with frostbite, so if people had read the story and I walk in to do a reading people secretly look at my hands to see if I have all my fingers, I have all my fingers, I had to research about frostbite, I didn't know about frostbite. So I think for me, even when you look—if you were to look at all of the stories, you would come away from my stories and say, Jody really cares about a natural world, which I do intensely, and she cares a lot about hands. So even that excerpt that I read on Phillip. He's looking at his hands so I have—because I think hands are very telling. And even in point of destruction the last story, one of the questions, this is a woman who is tired of dusting around things and is tired of all her things and she does something I've never done, but who knows? Which is she throws all of her things into the ocean to liberate herself because she thinks her house will rise up sort of like Noah's Ark, when the animals got off. And she talks about, why do we have the nuker and boborn and the fancy cuisine art and da da da, whatever happened to hand tools? Whatever happened? So I think that certain mentality comes about that this very grounded with hands. So in this story actually and I'll just read you the first paragraph, a little to bits on this story, it was not surprisingly originally called "This Dance". I would have liked the whole collection to be called This Dance. Remember Love is not sappy here, it's about a woman and man, dance partners and they go climbing together, winter climbing but he, his mother has Alzheimer's so—and he's right at that point where he's not sure if his mother will remember his name. People reading the story will often say to me, Mark must be wonderful guy and I'll say, “Yes, he's wonderful, but he doesn't dance and he doesn't mountain climb and his mother doesn't have Alzheimer's but other than that, yes, he's a marvelous guy.” But, so for me, I think when one starts out a story we're trying to start very invested in scene, in action. And we can see that through verbs and through a kind of closeness. So, one of the things that the story does, because the story is so short is it starts right in somethings. So, this story starts Remember Love. "The first time I danced with Mark I knew he would take me somewhere if I would let him. We were in dance class not choosing partners just rotating around the circle lots of men, but none like Mark who even before the music begins stood before me slightly crouch and bouncing, snapping his fingers on the off beats, waiting while the saxophone serge, the bass pulse deep into our bones, 2, 4, 6, 8 he added a small as if unconscious shimmy when the beat came back to one listening for the first set of phrases to finish, 5, 6, 7, 8 before he lowered his hand in front of me. One definite downward motion, 'Here now, take this.' His eyes lit up like the magicians laying out a deck of cards in front of an expectant crowd, 'Yes, yes you there, this one's for you.'” Now, I love to swing in windy dance. Mike doesn't swing in windy dance. So I'm using my expertise there and I'm connecting I know I can feel in the silence in the room that you all are connected, yeah baby go, right. Let's get that dance rolling. The hands comeback—so, schematically or structurally the fact that the hands would then be an issue at the end of story is key, right, because we've take so much for granted—our hands and one of the things that the doctor tells her when her—with her frostbite is, don't worry you'll get used to it. And she's thinking, "Wait a minute, I just lost some of my finger, I'm not going to get use it these are my hands." So, there is a kind of
structural play of one against the other. I'm trying to think right now and I don't remember or I need to think about it over the next 24 hours whether when I started the story I actually knew this was what was going to happen, because I suspect that I didn't. I suspect that somebody said to me, Jodie, you love to dance you've never written a dance story write a dance story and so, I boom plunge in and I tried to write it. The dancing and the fact that those of you who are not from the east coast don't know that there's a very famous highway in Philadelphia called the Schuylkill Expressway. And I had to look it up to know how to spell it, but that was one of my quilt pieces that I fought, Oh let's supposed in 50 years to becomes—a call, they call it the Google Expressway or the CBS Expressway. I want to keep Schuylkill, so it made its way to Philly. I know Philly. I don't set stories in places I've never been.

DVL: So, does having in a PhD in English help you as a writer?

JL: Oh my, so I finished—I did my PhD, I've finished it in 1991 and I started writing in earnest in 1995, I was an older PhD student. I had children when I began and I went and then I did a brief residency MFA in Writing Program and graduated in 1999. So, I did it backwards but whatever. And I have to tell you that when I started writing stories despite having a PhD in English with the specialty in English-French and American novels 1660 to the present. I knew nothing about how to write a story. I could not write a story for my life. And I think it's sort of the difference between the person—the auto mechanic say who knows all the Mercedes Benz pieces knows or the Porsche, let's go for the Porsche. All of the fancy the best the highest and pieces, but doesn't know how to put them together. So, I suspect—no it wasn't helpful at all in that regard, not at all. I think that perhaps, having read a lot maybe help me, I find my self today on revising a novel right now that I'm often very impatient with reading. I used to think that reading was a vicarious form of writing which is why I did a PhD in English, so I still say to Mike, hey if somebody wants to pay me a lot of money to lay on my bed and read books, that's not a bad job, right. But now I find myself impatient with that and I think because originally for me reading was a vicarious form of writing, but once I became a very serious writer writing as if vicarious form of reading and it's much more provoking for me it’s much—I'm happier doing that. It must be much more active engaged for me. I know I could apply theory—my field is feminist narrative theory, useless. I think people who have PhDs often have this little sensor birds sitting on their shoulder especially and going, "Oh that's lousy. Oh that's terrible. Jodie what are you doing? That stinks." Because we have a world that is kind of competitive and things like that and I do think that as a writer and many of you know this, one needs to get into one's work and think of structurally about what's holding the bridge up what makes it work, so.

DVL: So, kind of maybe along those lines and what advice might you give to someone who's beginning to think about writing or a beginning writer at whatever age it might be.

JL: Yeah, I think no matter what genre I would say, remember it's the art of fiction. It's not, its—so that would be one thing I would say that is you not journaling. You’re not telling the story of the lengthy conversation you had with somebody on the street the other day.

[Inaudible Remark]
JL: Right, very boring and very flat it's called the art of writing for reasons and that's because it's very much constructed. So one of the things I would say is remember it's the art and like dancing you need to learn the moves they will help you or like the plumber who arrives at your house she will do better with tools and her toolbox than without tools. She might solve the problem eventually. I would say the icon on my computer for my novel says not—you don't know the half of it, which is the temperate title of my novel but novel be brave. [Laughter] And that's to remind myself every time I go to my novel or to anything in life to be brave. And the third thing I think I would give as advice might be—and my writing students who are here will probably chuckle when I say this—verbs really matter. Nothing happens on the page unless you make it happen. There's everything and nothing magical about writing and this goes for academic writing as well for students who are doing that. That verbs are really that tickers their really the generators, so—and I would say keep your day job that would be my other advice.

DVL: Good. How was it different writing that novel as compared to writing these stories?

JL: I have a lot of sympathy for Atlas [laughing] writing a novel. I find that when you, when I write a story I'll speak for myself and people like Tim O'Brien, Tobias Wolff, people who have spoken about this, that to me and I was chuckling with Debora about this, because I think this is maybe an East Coast phenomenon that's less known by those of you lived always on the West Cost. Writing short stories is a good little bit like what happens when the lightning lights up the landscape in the thunder storms. So frequently, on the East Coast anyway, we'll have summer storms where you'll be sitting on your front stoop and I guess that's one piece the Western's don't tend in the storm to sit on their front stoop. But you'll be sitting on your front stoop it will be totally dark the lightning will come. It opens up and suddenly you can see everything as if it were broad day light in then it's gone. So a Hallmark and Disney have lead readers to think that short stories are supposed to lust for closure that there's the whole orchestra is supposed to play the fireworks are supposed to go off and things like that. But short stories are—you're really trying to get a person from point A to point B and that's it. That's why it's called the short story, poem; novels not only the most novels have what are known as plots in the subplot. But novels have tons and tons of reads. So I feel in writing a novel it's so complex oh, it's so hard I think it’s harder than raising children. And, I think of Atlas, who holds up the world and in one of the joys for me of this year and not teaching this quarter or next is a novel requires a hundred percent of the decision making battery. So, in so far as we all have these batteries in our bodies, people who are raising children have an emergency battery and they can't use that space which is why you sometimes see them stumbling about giving more energies because they have to save that battery for the emergency in their family, right. But my kids are grown now, so my battery, my decision making battery needs to be a hundred percent on making decisions about this mammoth thing in my novel. And I think that that's a huge difference between writing a novel and writing a short story. I remember of going to a reading once of Amy Tan's and her saying this is after—although she's defied this thought because she's now written another long novel, she stood up there and Amy Tan is only about yea tall, and in herself, and she said, after this I've decided I'm going to be a poet. [Laughing] So to me the
thought of having it on one page, so a novel but novel really gives us time. I think as readers when we pick up a novel we have a different attitude about it than we do.

DVL: I think I maybe have time for maybe one more question and that is, this—the characters in some of these stories, what and you know, because it is just as point A to point B kind of thing. In your mind, you know, what happens to some of them when you do you want to revisit any of them and are they I think one of this I was thinking as, you know, maybe they are the in the back of your mind maybe they are the neighbors of the people in your novel or something like that who may, well maybe not going to be mentioned or anything like but. Do they have a life after your stories in your stories in your mind?

JL: Yeah. You know, the scary thing is and you've heard writers far more famous and wealthy than I, say that they're really, each writer really has one story that you have to tell. We might tell it in many different ways but we are the same consciousness that's telling that story. So I was thinking that my novel for instance and I just had to learn how to write a pitch and I'm about to go to this very big writers' novel workshop that I got into with Robert Olen Butler, very big name and Jane Smiley in Santa Barbara in February in this—so I'm new at writing a pitch, I know as old as I am in these experiences, I'm supposed to know how to do this, right. Guess, what? I don't. So this will interest you because Debra hasn't—so my pitch for this novel right now which is called You Don't Know the Half of It or maybe Just Give Up the Dog I haven't decided, is this on this won't—this will allow you to sort of answer that question, "When Verna's [assumed spelling] gay twin sister Eliza [assumed spelling] dies and Verna's husband Ansell [assumed spelling] refuses to let their young sons Elliot [assumed spelling] and Franklin [assumed spelling] attend the funeral but surprises everyone by getting a puppy to show that love and life go on. Verna can't know the guilt or pull of blood loyalty she will face nine years later when her marriage breaks. When forces collide Elliot, 18, comes out, Verna admits a transgression, Ansell leaves, clueless Franklin, who's 17 sides with his father, and longtime neighbor Jenny [assumed spelling] severs her friendship with Verna, a wedding cake maker who would lie to her husband. Verna must figure out which part of her Rhode Island life to keep or give up as she faces the struggle of going to forth solo. How, Verna wonders do you a change a persons' mind, defend yourself or forgiving yourself and others the ways they cannot bend in the choices they make even if they don't call them choices? Catapulted into glass blowing determined to be patient as Franklin tries to take over Ansell's carpentry shop and forced into new friendships that reveal unpleasant truths, Verna ultimately faces the painful question. Can she, will she, must she, give up the dog to be able truly be free herself to move on in her life.”

Now this novel has many pieces it has a small piece of my life, my husband did allow my daughters to go to the funeral. I'm not a wedding cake maker. There are a whole series of other things here but there is a seed of my own life but what you can feel here is a concern of a women, who happens it to be middle age going to forward about how can she stay true to the love and loyalties that she feels and wants. And that's very much continuous of the sort of composite of the characters in the in short story collection. Yeah.

DVL: Thank you.
JL: You’re welcome, thank you.

DVL: Thank you very much for being here.

[Applause]

[Music]

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