Literary Conversation: GUNS

October 6, 2022

Gwydion Suilebhan: Good evening, and welcome to tonight's literary conversation about guns and gun violence, and literature. I'm Gwydion Suilebhan PEN/Faulkner's executive director, and I'm particularly glad that we have each other's company tonight. As we all try to reckon with the sobering news from Thailand about a horrific mass shooting in a childcare center. Thank you all so much for being here. At PEN/Faulkner we celebrate the power of literature to help us engage with the world with nuance and intelligence, just when we need the most like today, like every day, we have books.

They connect us to ourselves, to each other, and to ideas, and experiences, and people from all over the world. Books enrich our lives. You might know PEN/Faulkner because we give out the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the only major literary prize in America given by writers to writers. We also give out the PEN/Malamud Award for excellence in the short story, and we select an annual PEN/Faulkner Literary Champion.

Last year it was Oprah, and this year it's NPR's *Fresh Air* host Terry Gross. The truth is that about half of what we do is provide author visits and culturally relevant books and writing instruction to students in low-income schools in DC at no cost so that we can inspire the next generation of readers and writers.

Of course, we also host virtual literary programs like this one, which are available to everyone everywhere on a pay-what-you-will model, so we can make sure they're accessible even in times of economic fragility. With all of that in mind, I want to say, if you have the means, I hope you'll consider a contribution in support of our mission and programs. We'll drop a link in the chat.

For tonight's program, also to ensure accessibility, we are providing live captioning, which you can toggle on and off by using the CC button below. We'll be having a Q&A as part of the event too.

You can use the Q&A button to submit your questions at any time, including now. Now I want to introduce our amazing authors, and tonight's really amazing moderator. Jennifer Clement is President Emerita of PEN International. The only woman to hold the office of president since the organization was founded. She's also the author of the novels *A true story based on lies, The Poison That Fascinates, Prayers for the Stolen*, which was a PEN/Faulkner Award finalist. *Gun Love,* and *Stormy People*, as well as several poetry collections, and a memoir.

She's been the recipient of so many awards, including the Canongate Prize, the Sarah Curry Humanitarian Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an NEA fellowship. Her work has been or is being adapted for both film and television. Toni Jensen is the author of *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land*, a finalist for the

Dayton Peace Prize, and a *New York Times* Editor's Choice book. She was an NEA Creative Writing Fellowship recipient in 2020, and her essays have appeared in *Orion* and *Catapult*, and *Ecotone* among others. She is also the author of the story collection, *From the Hilltop*.

She teaches at the University of Arkansas and the Institute of American Indian Arts. Toni is Métis. Nic Stone is the author of *Dear Martin*, a number one *New York Times* bestselling novel that encourages readers to examine their biases and have honest discussions about race. Her mission is to tell stories that speak to kids underrepresented in YA literature who create windows in which young people are introduced to new perspectives and to offer mirrors in which children can see their ideas, and experiences and their identities fully represented.

In addition to *Dear Martin*, her books include *Dear Justyce*, *Blackout,* and *Clean Getaway*, which are all *New York Times* bestsellers. Last but not least, our moderator, Glory Edim, is the founder of *Well-Read Black Girl*, a podcast and a digital platform that celebrates the uniqueness of Black literature and sisterhood.

She edited the *Well-Read Black Girl* Anthology in 2018, which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award and named a Best Book of the Year by *Library Journal*. She was the 2017 winner of the Innovators Award from the *LA Times* Book Prizes, and she's worked as a cultural practitioner for more than 10 years.

Glory serves on the board of Baldwin for the Arts and New York City's Housing Works Bookstore, and her latest book, *On Girlhood*, was published in 2021. With that big ramble, I am turning this over to our moderator who will get tonight's conversation started. Welcome, Glory.

Glory Edim: Thank you for the wonderful introduction. I'm so happy to be here. We are going to start our conversation now. I will introduce everyone to the virtual stage. Welcome, Nic, Toni, and Jennifer.

Nic Stone: Thanks, Glory. We're excited to be here chatting with you tonight.

Glory: This is going to be a wonderful conversation, and I have such immense respect for everyone on the panel. Your books are fantastic. I have them all in my lap here because I'm going to be referring to the pages as I ask you questions. I think I want to start at the very, very beginning because something that struck me, which, each one of your titles, is how intriguing they were, how each title felt like an invitation to just inquire more about what the word means when you write something like *Gun Love*, or you have the word, carry, or you have the title, *Dear Martin.*

Each one felt like it symbolizes something so much greater. I thought it would be great to just talk about titles and what each title represented for each of you. How about we start with Jennifer? Would you like to talk about *Gun Love*?

Jennifer Clement: Sure. I guess there's many reasons and complex things that are going on, why it's called *Gun Love*, that gets referred to throughout the book, that becomes a more complex understanding of the title. Just cold seeing the title like this on the cover, for me, I was thinking of kinds of love. Mother love, and this kind of love, and that kind of love, and so, I ended up thinking that *Gun Love* could be a kind

of love. That is echoed throughout the book as a kind of metaphor in a way. I guess that would be my answer.

Glory: How about you, Nic?

Nic: I wish mine was as sweet and complex as that, but I wrote a book about a boy writing letters to a guy named Martin. Honestly, this is one of two books that I titled by myself because I am really bad at titling things, but it has come to take on far more weight and meaning than my initial, "Oh, well, he's writing letters to Martin so we can just call it *Dear Martin*."

Actually, I'm really thankful for the questions that get provoked by the title because it's one of those things where you weren't thinking anything of it when you created it, but people make meaning out of it, and I think that's a beautiful thing.

Glory: How about you, Toni? I know that there's an essay in the book with *Carry*. Did you know immediately that essay would be the title of the collection?

Toni Jensen: I did. The hard part was the subtitle. We had, I don't know, dozens of possible subtitles having to do more explicitly with guns, having to do more explicitly with violence against Indigenous women, and so we settled. I always have to look because we had so many. *A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land* is the subtitle and I think that works because it is a book about how you have to go back to the founding of the country to reckon with our history with guns. The country was stolen land at gunpoint essentially. I felt like that, this subtitle worked, but yes, *Carry* was always it.

The wounds we carry, the guns we carry, concealed carry, campus carry, I teach on a campus, all those things. It was always going to be the title. I have a hard time having a book come together until I know the title, so it was helpful to have it straight away.

Glory: That's wonderful to know, just the different responses from each of you and how you engage with the title. We can continue with you, Toni. I'm curious to think about, you use a term in your book, the difference between everyday violence and extraordinary violence.

As I was taking notes, that held my attention because even this word, extraordinary, I never think about it with the word violence, but it's such a true thing. How we categorize these things that happened, whether it's domestic violence versus mass shootings, these little microaggressions that we can encounter. Can you explain to the audience how you came to those two definitions?

Toni: Yes. For me, one example recently here in my community at a county fair, one person was shot. My daughter afterward, and her friends, were talking about whether it'd be safe to go the next day or not. My daughter said, "It was just one person." One person being shot, and she's not a callous kid at all, but she meant there are so many examples of extraordinary violence. Mass shootings, school shootings, things that make the big headlines. This was barely a blip. Then I had a friend respond to that who was there, who had her teenage girls there with her and their friends.

Getting them to safety, trying to get them not stampeded and trampled over while everyone was fleeing because they'd all heard the shots. That's extraordinary. I think the things that we call every day really are extraordinary when we're speaking of gun violence. What I'm trying to do by separating them out that way in the book is just to say, "This is what we do."

Even though gun violence is something we talk about in this house a lot, my daughter is even doing it. Saying, "Basically, this is every day. Every day, someone is shot." That's true and that's terrifying. What we call out is extraordinary, I think is to be put in question. It's all extraordinary. It's got to stay extraordinary if we're going to get anywhere.

Glory: I saw Jennifer and Nic both react to your example. I'm curious to hear what were your immediate-- For me, I'm just like, "Wow, that is surprising that we can find ways to normalize violence in that way." As you said, it's not necessarily that your child is callous, but it's this way that we see things continuously online, in the media, and it minimizes it. I'm just curious to hear what the other two panelists were thinking when you heard that story.

Nic: I'm going to do my best not to cry. Y'all can probably hear my children, welcome to life.

Glory: Right, exactly.

Nic: They're loud, embrace it. This story actually has to do with my children. Hearing you talk, Toni reminds me of, I was in the car with my children, this is shortly after the Uvalde shooting. I hear them talking about death, and most children are obsessed with death in some way or another. I think we try to squash that out of them, but really, we should just engage with it. However, this conversation going on in the backseat, I hear my younger son tell my older son, "Oh, I mean, you'll go to heaven before me." Basically, just the idea that you're older so you're probably going to die before I do.

My older son goes, "You don't know that. You might get shot." Even now, I don't really have words. It's difficult to engage with children around the topic of gun violence because frankly, what the hell do you say? They are exposed to so much just because even if we don't say anything to them, they're having active shooter drills in schools. It's mind-blowing to me because they aren't callous. They are just adjusting to the world as it is. I will say that as a mother, I hate it passionately.

Glory: I feel for you in that same vein of just trying to understand how to communicate with young people when it comes to these horrendous acts that are happening without causing too much alarm, but also understand this isn't normal. This shouldn't be your every day. I want to turn to you, Jennifer because your characters, they're mother, they're daughter. There's all of that happening in *Gun Love*. How do you take these stories that we're hearing and put it inside of a novel and make it feel so heartfelt, so real? I was so impressed with your dialogue.

It just felt like I was eavesdropping on a conversation in a lot of ways. How did you find, though, these characters and make them feel so real? Also, the research, I'm really curious to hear the research you did to create the landscape in *Gun Love*.

Jennifer: It ties into your previous question. The reason that Pearl is a young girl is because she doesn't know anything else. That is what's so interesting about it was just one because it's this acceptance because this is just ordinary if this is what you've grown up with. For me, it was very important that the character just be matter-of-fact.

She tells everything in this matter-of-fact way because she doesn't know that life can be any different. Now, your second question about the research, yes, the book is really a diptych. *Prayers For the Stolen* is a book about how perhaps a Mexican girl might get to the United States, and *Gun Love* is how an American girl might get to Mexico.

One thing that's very important to me about *Gun Love* is that it is a lot about the guns going to Mexico and Central America, which is not really talked about that much in the United States. The book is, yes, it's about violence in the United States, but it's also about the fact that there was a study at San Diego University that 48% of all profits made from guns in the United States are made south of the border.

If you look at Google Map at the US-Mexican border, on the US side, it's a wall of gun shops. All this immigration coming to the United States, fleeing from the violence of Central America, and the violence of the drug violence in Mexico is fueled by US guns.

Just today, we had a massive massacre where *Prayers For The Stolen* takes place, and where in *Gun Love* the Mexican was one of the gun runners, they're from this part of Mexico. Today, we had a mass shooting in a village. I think they already have said something like 22 dead. I know, and we all know that those are US guns that came into Mexico. A lot of research, I went to the NRA several times and visited the museum there, which is fascinating. I could talk about that a lot. I've written about that. A lot of research went into it.

Glory: I would love to hear from Nic and Toni, the research for your process as well. Nic, I know that *Dear Martin* was inspired by the death of Jordan Davis. You've shared that in other response to the protests and the deaths of other young Black men. When you take those scenarios from real life and then pull them into your narratives, what research do you do per se, to make sure that it feels accurate, but it's also in the vein of, it's still fiction, and young people can understand it?

Nic: I do my best to fictionalize things to the point where I'm not being disrespectful to the survivors and the families of the people who've been killed, but where it's undeniable that there's a link to something in current or past events because my biggest thing when I'm writing about these tough topics, especially topics around gun violence, topics around police shootings, the biggest thing for me is making sure that nobody can ever tell me that I made something up, or that this doesn't happen. I need to be able to point to something.

When I'm doing my research I'm very careful about-- A lot of the time I'm researching the family so that I'm not accidentally using any names, accidentally pulling in details that would reopen a wound, or brush over a wound that's not healed. The biggest, most important part of the research process for me is sitting down and talking with people who are like the people in the books. I remember when I was writing both

Dear Martin and *Dear Justyce*, so I'm working on *Dear Martin*, I sat down, and I had conversations with Black boys between 15 and 18.

I talked to them about, "Are you nervous you're going to be stopped by the police at some point? How do you feel about the fact that these boys are losing their lives, and they haven't done anything wrong?" Just sitting down and getting to know them on a personal level was a really powerful experience. The same thing with *Dear Justyce*, I traveled the country for eight months visiting juvenile detention centers and getting into these very deep one-on-one conversations with these boys just to find out what their lives were like.

That has been not only the most important part of my research process but the part that keeps me going when it comes to writing these kinds of stories because, unfortunately, this is stuff that's still happening.

There are still Black boys, well, really, at this point, more Black men, but there are still African American people who are being gunned down by police in the midst of unarmed and not really doing anything necessarily wrong. We're still dealing with kids who are falsely accused of things. We're still dealing with all of this.

Basically, everything in these books is still recognizable. I am looking forward to the point when all of the research and everything that I did was great, but it's looked on as something in the past. Like, when I read *Beloved*, I'm thinking of, "Oh, dang." I'm looking at it through the lens of the present, and I'm like, "Thank God, there's no slavery now. I don't have to do harm to my two-year-old to keep her from being sold into slavery." I'm looking forward to the day when this research and all of this work has helped to progress things to the point where it's looked at as historical fiction.

Glory: I applaud each of you for having such diligence because that is so clear in your writing, the research and the craft, and the thoughtfulness that goes into telling these stories. I want to pose the same question to you, Toni, because there was one essay, in particular, that I was just so taken with. I think it was, "Give and go." I loved the use of definitions, I get really obsessed with words, and how you broke down the word, shooter. There's just, each of you had such great ways of pulling the reader in and allowing them to engage, but also start to question their own projections or their own biases.

What was your process, Toni, when doing your research and trying to bring this collection to its perfect space?

Toni: Thanks for mentioning give-and-go. It's one of my favorites because it's about my childhood friend and her struggles as an adult, in part. It's about a lot of things. When I sat down to envision the book, I knew I had certain incidents I wanted to write about. Incidents of violence in my own life, incidents of violence in communities I've lived in, places I've lived in where police violence against unarmed people was really high, or that had histories like when I lived in Minneapolis, St. Paul. The American Indian Movement was founded there because of police violence against Indigenous people.

I knew touch points in history, and I knew contemporary incidents I wanted to write to were from places with which I'm familiar. I wasn't interested in going into

neighborhoods and spaces, and places where I've never spent any time. The Pittsburgh essay, I think was the hardest to write because I was only there for a year. My daughter was born there, so I felt some responsibility, and there was record violence, gun violence in our neighborhood that year. There was, it was a happy time, and it was a scary time in a lot of ways, and so that one was the hardest because I didn't know the place well.

For me, research was always guided by, do I know the place? Do I know the people? Am I from there enough to do this justice, or am I willing to put in the time? The time for me involved archival work, it involved reading, but it mostly involved talking to people and going back through.

Then figuring out if we didn't remember things the same, what to do about that because there are a lot of family stories. That was a lot of my research, and then also looking through every town's gun statistics and other sources like that and coming up with the statistical research to back up what we all know is true anecdotally. It was this sort of weaving together, but it was always in service of story, of knowing these stories from these communities and these places.

Glory: Oh, I appreciate that sentence. To be in service of story, that feels like the hallmark of being an author that should be your goal. I want to turn the stage towards Jennifer again and talk to you about this idea of the work being a form of activism. I don't know why that struck me, especially even though this is fiction, I really felt like there was a story about how people can be threatened by violence, find themselves vulnerable.

In this unwitting way, become activists in the story. Do you consider your work a form of activism? I'll pose this question to everyone, but when you're writing, when you're doing the research, do you consider it an act of activism, or is it like Toni just said, it's really just in service of the story?

Jennifer: I guess I'm in service of the story, and I'm looking for the language, I'm not looking to give out something. I'm looking to write almost always about something that just really disturbs me, or keeps me up at night, or it just doesn't let me go. Saying that, I have to say that there's no doubt that novels, especially, have been places of great social change. A novel can create tremendous social change, especially having been president of PEN International, one of the things we're very aware of is that the role of literature in change is very important.

Of course, there are very easy, huge examples in the English language. *Oliver Twist* changed child labor laws, and we don't remember the journalism of that time, but the book helped to change that practice. There are so many examples like this. Obviously, Toni Morrison, she did amazing work in this. The list is long, so it does prove the importance of literature to create social change. I don't write it to hope that that happens. I write, I hope, a good book, and then if something happens to create change, that's secondary.

Glory: How about you, Nic, how do you feel about that? That infusion of activism in your work, and would you call yourself an activist?

Nic: I don't know. It's so inherent to my being as a person who is-- I think as a queer Black woman, everything I do has activism at its core just because everything I do is an act of opposition to the status quo simply because I exist. What I will say is, I do consider it a form of activism in the sense of the thought of activism as agitation based. I think just by default, the things that I do have kind of an activist nature to them. My goal is always going to be making children feel seen, and drawing attention to things that I think are deserving of critical thought.

I will never be a person who tries to change people's minds, but I'm going to do my best to give you something to think about maybe a little bit harder. To me, that is the core of activism. I once heard-- I was in Philadelphia, and I totally snuck into this event that Ta-Nehisi Coates was having with a group of high schoolers, and he said, on stage, activism is about agitation. I will take that with me wherever I go because, to me, the flip is also true. If I am agitating, there's a good chance that there's some kind of activism going on based on what I'm writing. That's how I think of it.

Glory: That's great. Now, we'll turn to Toni.

Toni: I like the agitation model a lot and thinking about it, that your words on paper that go out into the world might cause some discomfort. I guess I think of it as discomfort. I teach too, and I think of classrooms as spaces, not of comfort, but of profound discomfort. Teaching people how to sit with some discomfort and to think about things thoroughly. I hope my work will do that.

As it's already been said by other folks, I don't necessarily set out to do that in my writing. These are just the stories I'm drawn to. I said I would write a puppies and flowers and kittens book next, and that's not happening. I try.

I think about it, I write notes, but I don't ever get past, I think it's 249 words on the puppies and kittens, kind of lighter things. That's not very far, that's not a book. This is just the work I want to do. I don't see it necessarily as activism, but I would love it if it would spur people toward activism or make conversational space toward activism. I think of activism as things I did maybe more when I was younger, or like my daughter does, where you show up to a thing.

Now I drive her and I bring the snacks because I'm middle-aged, but those kids, the way that people are out putting their bodies on the line sometimes or putting their bodies in a space, I guess I see that more as activism, but that's probably just my own hangup about growing older. It's probably not real. Probably writing is also activism, yes.

Glory: I appreciate each one of you just sharing that with us because there is something about acknowledging that it could be what you want it to be. One person can take their pen and say, "This is going to be something that's going to change the world politically, it could be part of my activism, my agitation." Another can turn and say, "I want to provoke, I want to inspire. I want to help people feel strong enough and brave enough to face that." I really do appreciate that because it depends on who's holding the pen. They can decide that.

I'm going to go back to when I first got approached to do this moderate, I was really taken by the title, just to have guns. No disclaimer, no, "This is what we're going to

talk about," and joined to this conversation and see what that means. As I was reading, of course, I had that word in my forefront. I got to the last page of your book, Jennifer, and I'm going to read it to you all. "In my daydream, I lay amongst skeletons as gun parts where long femurs and ribs, and ribs like the images in x-rays. X-rays of pieces of broken bodies broken, and I smelled gunpowder, and maybe I smelled rust and blood, and blood and rust, and the souls of animals and the souls of people were all around me.

I heard a song of praise, applause. I heard Pearl, Pearl, Pearl in congratulation." Throughout the whole book, I was just really taken, but this last sentence, even the gun parts like skeletons, it became part of the body. I was thinking of just the political landscape now and how guns, they mean so much, they represent so much. It's like almost they're part of our body.

They're like part of the American fabric, the American body. I wanted to hear you just break apart this last page without giving spoilers. I know some people have read, some people have not, but when you were concluding this book, what were you hoping would land with the reader with this very visceral description of gun, and the smell, and the blood? All of this book feels this way. It feels very intense, but I would love to hear you break that last paragraph apart for us.

Jennifer: I think it's a little bit mysterious to me too because everything that has happened before this moment. I'm also on the board of an organization called SHOT, which is one of the most extraordinary organizations. Basically, we don't think about all the people that survived this shooting. We count the dead, but the people that survive, their lives are completely ruined, and they're full of bullets and broken pieces of bones. That really affects me very deeply that we don't talk enough about people that survive because they don't really survive.

The other thing is that in Mexico when the police capture drug traffickers with tons of guns, one of the things they do is they break up the guns and use them to build roads. The roads are full of gun parts. I could talk about this for a long time, but the idea of gun parts, and body parts, and bones, and rifles is a theme that appears in quite a lot of my work.

Glory: I will turn that question to you, Nic, to think about how do you feel guns show up or just the collective memory of what it means to have a gun. I know in college I had a poster of Malcolm X against the wall holding a gun, and that representation, I felt empowered and bold. I had never touched a gun.

I had never had a real experience with it, but when I saw Malcolm X holding it, it meant something different to me. I felt proud of that image, versus, in another scenario when I see a gun, and I feel threatened and afraid. I would love to hear how when you're talking about violence or guns, or just what that represents in your novels, whether it's *Dear Justyce* or *Dear Martin*.

Nic: I feel like you just read my soul out to everybody watching right now because *Dear Martin* is a book about a kid writing letters to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was a man who vowed to never have a gun. His house got firebombed, and there's this interview where he talks about considering getting a gun for the sake of protecting himself, but he never did because he said to himself, "I would rather be

accepting of death than take this object into my hands that's able to bring about death." It was one of those things that really blew my mind because, for my 21st birthday, my father took me to the firing range.

My dad is a retired police officer and that was his thing. Like, "You are going to know what--" I could tell you, "Oh, that's a 9 millimeter Beretta, that's a 22 gauge." I can tell you all of these things, but I don't want to touch them either. I find that in the world that we live in today, and I'm sure people are going to be like, "Oh my God," but I find myself very much understanding of people who cling to their Second Amendment rights. I understand that. My father is one of those people. Growing up, my dad always, and he had an open-carry license, so his gun was on him.

He had a shoulder holster that he carried around everywhere we went. He was a police officer. Even when he was in his regular clothes, he had his gun on him. I've seen, and I understand, and I've done the research to dig into that culture because it is a culture. Where things get blurred is when you have people who are hurting. It's like, frequently, there's a lack of understanding of how powerful a gun can be and what a gun can do. That's where things get fuzzy for me because I absolutely think that there should be really more intensive gun control laws.

I absolutely believe that people should have to go through background checks. I also recognize that it's been such an integral part of American culture. It's in the foundations. It's in our founding documents. It's something that I constantly vacillate about. Every time there's a mass shooting I weep. One of my very best friends was killed in the Pulse Massacre in Orlando. I vividly remember the panic of calling him and him not answering the phone. I remember texting and not getting a response, and then the next morning I was literally sitting in my mother's driveway.

I pulled my car into my mother's carport at her townhouse, and I saw his name on the list. They had released the names of the victims. I will never forget that moment. I also recognize that there are people who have been saved by a gun. It's all so complex, and I think that the best thing that we can do for ourselves is make sure we get an understanding of as much of it as possible before forming an opinion.

Then when you do form an opinion, not imposing that opinion on other people. That's the beauty of being a person, especially a person in this very individualistic culture that we are a part of. We get to decide how we feel about things. I just want people to be very, very careful and very cognizant, and very deliberate about the things that they engage with before making their decisions. I don't even know if I answered your question, but I'll step off my soapbox now.

[laughs]

Glory: You did. No, that was beautiful. I appreciate you sharing that with us. We're going to turn it to Toni as well because I'm very curious to hear your description of what it means to have a gun in American culture and what it represents. Between Jennifer and Nic, they've both shared different representations and different ideas, and I'm really curious to hear your take on that.

Toni: I grew up in a house with guns too. A lot of guns. My dad had five brothers and several of them were law enforcement, several of them had been in the military.

They all grew up hunting. I grew up in really rural area, and now I live in a slightly more urbanized part of the South, but it's still gun culture. I don't know that I've ever lived anywhere that wasn't really deeply steeped in gun culture. It's the same as growing up I think in sports culture. In a way, you know the names of things, you know what they look like, you can name them.

On the other hand, though, it's killing us. This culture, we have to think about it. We have to interrogate it, we have to break it down. I also grew up in a house where I grew up in a house with a lot of guns, and I grew up in a house with domestic violence. We have to address the correlation between gun ownership and domestic violence, between gun ownership and taking those guns outside the house, as I talk about a lot in *Carry*, and what happens next. Most mass shooters, statistically speaking, have a record of domestic violence, and so we have to talk about these interrelated social problems.

I see gun culture as a social problem, how we don't openly discuss it. That, and domestic violence. How they are things that get swept under the rug, they're not serving us well so far. Yet also, I had an uncle who passed away a year or two ago, who had a gun. He lived up in northern Minnesota. He was getting around by a golf cart or by cane, and he had his gun in case he came upon a bear in the woods.

Do I think he needed that gun? Do I think he would have been able to kill a bear with it? I don't know. Maybe, but I understand that at his age, he's going to hang onto that gun, and it would have been very difficult for any of us to have talked him out of it, though some of us tried. There are those people, and I have empathy for them. I have relationships with lots of them, so I think it's a complex issue. It's not easy, but it's a worthwhile conversation, and we're not getting anywhere. We're being quiet about it.

Glory: I think that's the value of having spaces like this where we can engage and use literature and books as a way to navigate through the difficult conversations or add nuance to it, where sometimes people can be really black and white as if it's like guns or no guns, and there's nothing in between. I appreciate all the different examples of how these things can really show up in real life, they can show up in our policy-making, in our everyday homes. It's not just this one isolated case, it requires you to interrogate and to be very mindful of how people live their lives.

The next question I would love to talk to everyone about is, I'm leaning more into the craft of each one of your books, and I am completely obsessed with revision and what is left out of a book at times. Each of you have, I feel like it was so carefully crafted in terms of sentence structure or even the length of the book. I am a fan of a book that is under 250 pages. That's the perfect number. You could do that, and on a good rainy day, you can do it in a whole day. [laughs] Such a good amount, but when I see that number, I always recognize what is left out.

I'm sure there was so much left on the cutting room floor. I want to take it to Jennifer because I was really curious on your process of putting the characters, developing your characters, and what was left out working with your editor. Is that something you could divulge a little bit?

Jennifer: I don't know. I don't really have a sense of what was left out. I guess I am very spare, so one of the problems that I always have when I write is that I write 10 words and then I cut 30. I'm always climbing backward, I can never really climb forward. It's hard because of the way that I write.

It's very poetic prose, but what I can say is that certainly in *Gun Love*, again, the title back to just the first question, is that for me, *Gun Love* is really like a ballad. It's like a great long song to me. Even the opening line, the first time I heard Pearl's voice and she said, "My mother was a cup of sugar, you could borrow her anytime," I can hear in my head the guitar, [onomatopoeia].

The whole book, I just hear the music the whole time, and it's full of music. No, I don't have a sense of having taken something out. There were certain things that were very important that I knew had to be there. For example, a lot of people think that the book takes place in Florida because I care that it takes place in Florida. I don't. The only reason it takes place in Florida is I wanted to get to Corpus Christi, Texas because I wanted to talk about Selena Quintanilla who was shot and killed, and who I love. All of that trajectory was really to be able to get there.

Also, I wanted her to cross into Mexico at the Lincoln-Benito Juárez Bridge because that's a very symbolic bridge, and also that it's surrounded by tremendous gun shops, that whole area. That was more important to me, the story of Selena, than the fact that it was in Florida. The cutting, I can't really think of what I cut exactly.

Glory: I highlighted that first line too. What seemed like the beginning of your end, I was like, "Oh, did she do a MFA in poetry as well? This is so, so stunning." It did feel very lyrical. Adding that ballad, I read that. I totally felt that. I'm going to turn it to Nic. Was there anything that you left or that you added in *Dear Justyce* the next time? What was the editing process like for you?

Nic: I had the whole opposite experience of Jennifer. I cut *Dear Martin* in half. The original draft of this book was 79,000 words. It had eight points of view, it was non-linear. It was the same book, but completely differently told.

Glory: You have a play that we're going to see later. [laughs]

Nic: Listen. I cut 40,000 words from this. I cut a book from this book, and it sucked. It was the number two worst writing experience I've ever had, largely just because it was such hard work. I did it again recently. I have a book coming out in February that I recently cut in half. I think that for me, I'm really glad for everything that got left on the cutting floor. There's a couple of things that I'm like, "Dang, I was doing such a good job of cutting. I maybe should have fleshed this part out a little bit more. I should have left a little more of this, a little more of that."

My editor read the initial draft of *Dear Martin*, and basically, she was like, "Nope." I was like, "What do you mean nope?" What do you even say to that? She had bought it on proposal, so I sold my debut novel on proposal. I do not recommend this to anyone because once you sell something on proposal, your editor knows what they're looking for, and you will have to fall in line. She had some really excellent points. The cuts that I made, it simplified the book, it streamlined it, it made it one single point of view. Her goal was to appeal to what I call high-taste readers.

There are people who refer to certain kids as reluctant readers. I'm like, "No, they're reluctant, they just don't want to be bored." They have higher tastes than the people who are okay with being bored, I guess. It's a rhetoric trick to make these kids feel good about themselves. She was right, me cutting the book, it's 208 pages, cutting it in half and simplifying it, kids get hooked in instantly. Now I refuse to write a book that's longer than 45,000 words. [laughs]

Glory: Good for you.

Nic: It is. Right.

Glory: Adults also appreciate that. [laughs] What about you, Toni?

Toni: The book started for me as this document. I had a few essays written, but I had a document called *Waiting for the List of Names*. It was when I was waiting after the shooting in Orlando at Pulse Night Club because I taught there. That document grew and grew and grew and grew. It was just all the interconnected violences, and so I had all these incidences from my life and from the life of the people I was waiting on hearing if they were still with us. A lot of that did not make it into the book, but I wrote it. Yes, *Carrie* probably it's double its size, if we went back and took every, I call them extra files, every extra file. Every chapter had at least two extra files except for maybe *The Kingman of Arizona* only had one because I knew that story and where it was going straight away. *Lubbock, Texas*, I've got three or four pieces on Lubbock, because Lubbock is a high crime, high violence place, and it's a place I love. I lived there for a long time. I've got a lot of Lubbock pieces that maybe I'll do something with at some point.

Yes, my editor-- I sold my book on proposal too, and they do have an idea of what they think belong. She took out a lot of the sports and that made me sad, but other than that, I felt like there's not as much basketball in this book as there was, but that can be for another book, right? Anyway, I think that it was mostly personal incidences.

It's a very sad book if you include every single thing, also, and there had to be room for beauty and imagery and lightness and the full complexity of other people's stories. I don't regret any of the cutting except there was more about Russell Westbrook in the first book, in the *Give and Go* essay. [laughs] I do regret those cuts but otherwise, no, I don't regret any of it.

Glory: Shout out. [laughs] We're going to open it up to Q&A. If you have a question, and as you're watching the audience, please place your question in the Q&A, the chat box at the bottom of the screen. Another thing that I really enjoy doing after I read a book, I have an extra file, I like that reference, where I like to think about the books, how they're in conversation with other things that I'm reading, if it makes me think of a particular short story or another character, and how they could be in relation. Especially when it comes to historical fiction, and then something contemporary, I like to really think about putting those things against each other.

I would love to hear from each of you, who your characters or who your books are in conversation with. If there was going to be a book pile and they were all together as one, are there any titles or authors that come to mind? Who would like to start?

Nic: I can. I feel like there's a group of us, me, Jason Reynolds, Andrew Thomas. Oh, man, why am I blanking on names? This is terrible. There's a handful-- Mark Oshiro is a really great example.

There's a handful of us that wrote these books about, really, police misconduct and gun violence that-- It's like gun violence, and also gun violence perpetuated on oppressed peoples by people who are in the position to be oppressive. I think that those books, *The Hate U Give, All American Boys, Anger Is A Gift* is a really great one. There are so many of these books that you're getting a similar story, but from these very different perspectives, and I love that. I think that that's a really important thing.

Glory: How about you, Jennifer?

Jennifer: I don't know. I haven't really thought about that question. I'm caught off guard thinking with whom the book would sit? Certainly, there's a lot of song lyric, so I was checking out a lot of songs and songs written about guns and things like that to get this feeling. It's a weird thing to say but the book is in complete conversation with a previous book of mine *Prayers for the Stolen*. You could literally stitch a tapestry between these two books.

Certainly, it would have to sit with that book, but it is my own book. I guess what comes to mind, would really, I think, the song lyrics.

Glory: How about you, Toni?

Toni: I was reading a lot of poetry when I wrote *Carry*, and I do still read a lot of poetry. I feel like probably, Natalie Diaz. Her book *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, Cassandra Lopez *Brother Bullet*. Erica Meitner's' book, I think came out slightly after mine. It's *Holy Moly Carry Me*, it's about gun violence. She teaches at Virginia Tech.

That book, in particular, the breadth of it, because it's about family and motherhood too, and Cassy's *Brother Bullet* is as well. They all are, really. Probably those books, because they're in conversation about land and who you belong to, who belongs to you, as well as guns and gun violence.

Maybe also, the **[unintelligible 00:55:09]** *The Roundhouse* too because it's about violence and not so much about guns, but about land waste and policy and violence. Those might be the ones.

Glory: Yes, that's great. It's always awesome to hear that, then afterwards, you can-- Jennifer in your case, we can make a playlist of songs, and we can create different curated reading lists, so people can know that once-- Even, naturally, this conversation, I feel like all of your books are in conversation with one another, have the central theme around how we can in some ways overcome the stigma around not talking about gun violence, because that's another thing, where the conversation can come very didactic.

It's like you're lecturing to people about you should do this, versus you should do that. Versus let's have a really thoughtful intentional conversation about how this changes communities, how this impacts families, how people are lost from the

violence, but how some people remain, and their lives traumatically change. Which is a conversation that I see.

I'm a member of different coalitions, and I donate to a lot of different organizations, including every town, because I want there to be more conversations and more safe spaces. I think my next question is going to really be around more of the emotional tenor of what it means to write about these subjects.

Because again, each one, they're dense in subject, they can be traumatic. Toni, you've mentioned that you talked about the experiences you had as a child, with losing your friends to domestic violence. How did you each take care of yourselves as you were writing such intense topics, and was there a ritual or practice you had to pull yourself out of it, and just place yourself in your real world again, as you were writing about these things? If you don't mind, we can start with you, Toni.

Toni: Yes. One thing I did that I don't regret for the most part is I got a great big dog. Penny-- She was 100 pounds when we got her and she was underfed. She's very soft, so I think having some animal to pet was the-- People talk about elaborate stuff, self-care rituals, and I never know what to make of any of that. I admire it, I'm a little skeptical. I got a dog and I pet her. Now, she's 137 pounds, she was really underweight, and that remains happy to have her.

I cooked a lot. As far as taking care of myself, I took care of the book, too, and the people in the book, if that makes sense, and showed them care. We've moved since then, but I had it up right next to my writing desk back then, more love songs, more candy. Just making sure everybody was taken care of in the book, that they got the full picture of themselves put forward, all of that. What kind of candy did they like to eat? What love songs did they like? That kind of thing. I tried to do that for myself, but probably, I'm better at doing it for the people in the book than for myself. It was a long decompression period after I handed it in.

Glory: That's great. How about you, Nic?

Nic: I was terrible. I didn't take care of myself at all while working on *Dear Martin*. Really, the six or seven books after that, I just went really, really, really hard for four years or so. Fabulously, *Dear Martin* came out in 2017, so, October 17th will be the five-year anniversary of the book. It's this year that I looked at myself and said, "If you don't sit down somewhere and take a breath--"

Now, I'm really great at self-care with my very bourgeois monthly facials, every 10 days I get a manicure and pedicure. These are things that I'm able to do because I went so hard for so long. I have a real complicated relationship with work, to be completely honest, and I'm still trying to figure it out.

The way that I came out, and really, the way that I stayed buoyed while working on *Dear Martin* was that I looked at the people I was writing it for, which are my two little boys. My son Kieran is 10, Milo is 6. Milo was not born when I wrote *Dear Martin*. I got pregnant the fall after I wrote the first draft. I found Dear Martin in my 10-year-old's iPad case the other day, and I said, "You put this in here?"

He got very shy and embarrassed. He told me that he had, and I said, "Did you read it?" He apparently read the whole thing last week. I said, "Why didn't you tell me?" He said that he didn't tell me because he was embarrassed. He was embarrassed because he didn't like it. Here we are, friends.

Glory: [laughs] It's always your own kids.

Nic: "Boy, I wrote it for you. What do you mean?" I asked, I was like, "You're going to read *Dear Justice* now?" He's like, "Since I didn't like *Dear Martin*, I decided to read *New Kid* instead." I was like, "Okay."

Glory: Like, "*New Kid*?" [laughs]

Nic: My reason for continuing to go didn't actually like the product, but that's totally fine, because [crosstalk].

Glory: He can revisit when he's 16, maybe.

Nic: Yes, when you're older, maybe you'll like it better. It's paying for your private school right now.

Glory: There you go. That's good entertainment. Oh, the qualms of being a parent. That's hilarious. How about you, Jennifer? Especially with the travel, it seems like you travel quite a bit to get all the details, and make sure-- You mentioned the gun shops on the border and the museum. How do you keep yourself grounded as you're doing this very intense research and building these worlds?

Jennifer: I don't know. One thing I can say is what I do need is to be alone. Even when I had little children, I would go and spend a couple of days in a hotel room, because I need almost to be living the book in a very intense way. To have any outside things going on, I find it really difficult. There's all this process of finding time to be completely alone.

Certainly, there are times when I have to read the whole book from start to finish over a few days, and hold the book. I can't have any interruptions or anything. When I'm writing, I'm always in a state of schizophrenia, because I always feel I'm in two worlds. I'm in this world that we're having now, but the other world is always there, and very often stronger, the other world.

I don't know how to explain it, it's a strange thing, but I do want to address what Toni said, because I'm very careful to never put my characters in a situation in which they lose their dignity. Already, just everything is a loss of dignity, so I do not want that my writing contribute to that. I will never write a rape scene or things like that.

For example, in *Prayers for the Stolen*, when she describes this gang rape that happens to her, she says, "You know, what can I tell you? I was like a plastic water bottle that everybody took a swig of." That's the door that I will go in through. I'm always making sure that because of language, I'm preserving the dignity of my character.

There's a moment in the book where I really fall in love with everybody, and that's when I know it's working, because I feel protective. I feel like a lioness about them all.

Glory: That's so brilliant. That protective nature that happens as an author or someone, you just want to protect your characters. Thank you for sharing that. We have some really incredible questions also, that we're going to turn to in the chat. Again, if you have more questions, if you have anything you want to share with the authors, please place it in the chat, and I'll read them out loud. This first one, we're going to turn back to this topic of guns and mass shootings and all these things that are happening in our society.

This question is regards the world record for mass shooting. The US holds the world record for mass shootings, more than one in every day of the year, 100s and 100s of people dead and wounded. It is hard for those of us in other countries to understand why Americans tolerate this death toll. What do you think it will take to deescalate gun culture in the US, and thus in the border countries that suffer the consequences, too, of this culture?

If you don't mind, Jennifer, if you would take that question first, given the nature of your book and the fact that you're really focused on the border countries, with *Gun Love*, what do you think of that? With us holding the world record for mass shootings,is there anything that would provoke gun culture de-escalating?

Jennifer: That's a very good question. I keep thinking this is the thing that will change everything. Every time something terrible happens, I think, "Oh, yes. This is the one." Then everything just keeps going normally. Then another terrible thing happens, and you think, "Oh, this is the one that's going to change everything."

What I've come to realize in this very fatalistic way is that we have not yet seen what is going to make things change. That just fills me with horror, is the truth. Also, we've talked about the second amendment a little bit, but going to the museum, I found very disturbing. I went back several times because I was trying to understand this infatuation and worship, I would call, of guns.

The essay that I wrote about it is called the *Church of Gun*, because actually, the museum is set up like a church, with chapels and with altar in the front. In each chapel, there are all these things to guns that would be the president's gun in one, and a boy's room from the 1950s, with all his red flannel bed and these little toy BB guns. Then there'd be one of killing game in Africa, those great guns, and the guns of Hollywood, it's another chapel with all those guns of all those people.

At the end of the museum, there was a gun in the middle all by itself, that had an eternal flame under it. Yes, exactly. It was completely melted, and it was a gun that was found in the rubble of 9/11. Then you go into the museum shop, and you can buy a little pink bib for a little girl baby that says NRA on it. It's just like, what is this? I just find it very very disturbing.

Glory: What are your thoughts, Toni? Nic?

Toni: That museum is really something. I've been there, too. It does feel like a church. You're not at all wrong about that. I agree. It's a surreal experience, a lot of diving into the fashion of gun culture. It's a monetized, commercialized system in so many ways. There's so many accessories, and all of that to be fascinating. I think sometimes, it helps us to go back rather than to go forward, or imagine going forward.

Until the Reagan years, the NRA did not have a lobbying arm. It was not a political entity, it was a sporting organization. The Reagan years are within my lifetime, and that's not that long ago historically.

If we can go so far away from the culture we had then to the culture we have now in that short amount of time, what can we do in a similar timeframe going forward? Maybe there's some hope in that. Or it's going to have to be legislated, and that is going to be ugly for everyone and difficult, but it's going to have to be some combination of just a major shift from these next generations. I hate to put more things on their shoulders. We already are putting climate crisis on their shoulders.

I think it's going to have to be going forward and not looking back, what was happening in the years pre-Ronald Reagan era, where we had a different culture literally, around guns, and how did we allow the NRA to shift things so dramatically, and how can we shift back? I think those are the questions I have.

Glory: Yes. As you said, I was like, "The internet?" That's definitely part of the issue. I'm curious to hear what you think, too, Nic.

Nic: What Jennifer said really resonated. I hate that it did, but I think that you just made such a powerful point. I think about the civil rights movement and the turning points in the legislation that led to desegregation, ending Jim Crow. Even the fact that it took the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. being shot for a whole slew of legislation to get passed, it's almost like, out of this guilt that people were feeling over the death of this man. I remember when I was doing research for *Dear Martin*, reading about nonviolence as a tactic to accomplish social change, and how really, the goal of nonviolence is to appeal to people's consciences.

The only way that happens is when things get so grotesque, that nobody can turn away. I feel exactly what Jennifer said, I find that terrifying. What is it going to take for people to say-- It's like, you have these incidents where small children are murdered in their classrooms at school, and the solution that is proposed is to arm the teachers. I don't understand.

I say this even as a person who when it comes to gun culture, I've done a pretty decent deep dive into gun culture. It's almost like, at what point do we recognize that these things that make people feel powerful are also being used in ways that take away other people's power? At some point, there's got to be some kind of a reckoning. It's scary, just like Jennifer said.

Glory: I would flip that question on its head a bit to say, and this is actually a question from one of the watchers out there. Thank you, everyone, for being here with us. What gives you all hope? On the opposite side of the things that are terrifying and just feel heavy and there's no light, what keeps you hopeful to keep

writing, to stay consistent with the work that you're doing, and allowing it to really flourish despite the obstacles that are ahead?

Nic: When it comes down to it, I'm still here. If that's not reason enough for hope, I don't know what is. I also look back. I'm a person who loves digging into history to see what things were like. This is the reality that we live in, and it is unprecedented in every way. Everything that we are experiencing has literally never happened before in the way that it's happening. What's helpful to me is to look back at times when things were different. Sometimes, those things were worse. Studying the civil rights movement actually gives me a lot of hope. Even when it comes down to things like banned books.

The fact that people are banning books, while on the one hand, is a little scary, it's also a sign that we've progressed in a way that people are ruffled about the changes that are happening. My hope really is rooted in my continued existence. It's rooted in the beauty of my sweet little children who sometimes, are not very sweet at all. I think that there's always some kind of light. When I zoom out, we are on this speck of a planet in this very wide solar system that's situated in what we know of as one universe. There could be more of them.

Just thinking about scale is also something that I find super helpful, because it's like, "Okay, what thing can I do to make somebody's life less miserable today?" Sometimes, that just has to be enough.

Glory: Thank you so much for that. I appreciate that. How about you, Toni?

Toni: In the course of writing the book, then continuing to do writing on this topic, I meet so many people whose lives have been so much harder than mine, and who've been touched more directly by guns and gun violence, and they have hope. If they can walk around, trying to enact change and be helpful, then I should probably get dressed and go to work. I feel like the showing up for each other, the caring each other's lives for and our stories for. I think it's absolutely right, we're still here and that's to be celebrated. After the last few years, I can't imagine not celebrating that. That's what gives me hope.

Glory: You, Jennifer?

Jennifer: I think I have a similar answer. For me, I've had the incredible privilege to meet some of the bravest people in the world, people who have given up their livelihood or their homeland, their family, and often given their lives to defend the truth, for the telling of the truth. I'm just always in awe of all these people. Through the PEN work, I've met these brave souls all over the world, and they fill me with hope. It's just amazing to see that kind of bravery, really.

Glory: I was so excited to talk to you each, that there's a portion of reading that we were supposed to do. [laughs] Maybe we'll just do a snippet, maybe two or three sentences from each person's book. I did read a piece from *Gun Love* that I love. I would love to hear another sentence or two from you, Jennifer. If each of you could read a couple of sentences and give some context to it. How about we start with you, Nic, from *Dear Martin*? Is there a few sentences you can share and give people a taste of your beautiful writing?

Nic: You are far too kind. Also, I'm like, "This should be interesting, because this is the book that is very much in the voice of a 17-year-old Black boy," so beautiful writing might be a stretch to some people who are watching, but I absolutely will. Let's see. [silence] In this book, for those who are not familiar, the main character's name is Justyce.

He gets racially profiled in the opening chapter, so he starts this journal of letters that he writes to the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., really to see how Dr. King's teachings would hold up today, as he's literally facing racism on a daily basis. This is one of the letters that he writes after he gets into a fight, so I'll just leave it at that.

"Dear Martin, you know, I don't get how you did it, just being straight up. Every day, I walk through the halls of that elitist ass school, I feel like I don't belong there. Every time Jared or one of them opens their damn mouth, I'm reminded they agree. Every time I turn on the news and see another Black person gunned down, I'm reminded that people look at me and see a threat instead of a human being. There was some White dude on TV after the Tavarius Jenkins thing broke, talking about how cases like his and Shemar Carson's deflect from the issue of Black-on-Black crime, but how are Black people supposed to know how to treat each other with respect when since we were brought over here, we've been told we're not respectable?"

"What the hell are we supposed to do, Martin? What am I supposed to do? Be like Manny and act like there's nothing wrong with a White dude asking his 'niggas' to help him exploit a Black girl? Do I just take what they dish out? Try to stop being so sensitive? What do I do when my very identity is being mocked by people who refuse to admit there's a problem? I know I did the wrong thing, tonight but right now, I can't find it in me to be remorseful. Those assholes can't seem to care about being offensive, so why should I give a damn about being agreeable?" I've got to say, I've been reading your sermons and studying your books for six months now, and it feels like all I have to show for is frustration and a sense of defeat. I swear I heard some girl ask, 'Why are Black people so angry all the time?' as I left Blake's house, but how else am I supposed to feel? My hand hurts. I'm going to bed. JM."

Glory: Listen, I appreciate your writing because I was that 17-year-old writing letters. It wasn't to Dear Martin, I was obsessed with Nannie Burroughs. I don't know if anyone knows who that is. Please, look her up. She's from Washington, D.C. I used to write letters all the time as a 16-year-old to a 17-year-old.

Sometimes, they would get mailed out. Sometimes, they would just sit in my journal, and it sounded a lot like that, just trying to process and understand who I am in this space when I'm not always welcomed and appreciated. Thank you for that. Toni, would you like to read something from *Carrie*? If you would give us an introduction to which essay and give us some context, that would be greatly appreciated.

Toni: Yes, I am going to read just a little snippet from the *City Beautiful* essay, which is about Orlando, that's the section that I decided on. The shooting at Pulse Nightclub, that neighborhood is one I know well. I kept thinking Omar Mateen got his weapons training at G4S when he was an employee there.

G4S were the same security organization group that took the dogs and the rubber bullets to Standing Rock. The ways in which these things are connected really struck

me. I also kept thinking about place and about neighborhood, and how that's not a walking neighborhood so much. Where Pulse was, it's a driving neighborhood, and so I was thinking about all the cars and all the people who would have to come and pick up the cars in the days after. I'll read that section.

"How do you enter that car? How do you collect yourself for that drive home? How do you make your knees fold like they're meant to, or your hands hold the key? What I want for everyone there is to have the will to do this everyday, regular act under these terrible irregular circumstances. What I want is for everyone all across this our America to say no more, to say this will be the last time anyone will have to make a drive like this to say, this will be the last time anyone will have to feel the weight of holding those keys."

Glory: Thank you so much. We're going to close with Jennifer. If you can read some from *Gun Love*. A beautiful sentence, a ballad to us.

Jennifer: Okay. Pearl is watching how her mother is falling in love, crazy falling in love with the wrong guy. As she says, "Now that my mother was loving Eli, she was tasting him deep, and only getting a wishing-well kind of hunger, she'd never be full again. When Eli left and I was back in the car, I watched as she licked the inside of her palms for his taste like a kitten. At night, she slept wearing one of Eli's shirts, and moved around fretfully in her sleep. If my mother had watched another woman in this condition, she would've had the diagnosis in a second. My mother would've said, Pearl, it's like that song she's asking for water, but he's giving her gasoline."

Glory: Everyone's nodding. We're like, "We are there." Perfect, so absolutely perfect. I want to give a deep, deep thank you to you all for sharing your stories with us, having this incredible conversation. I'm going to now turn it over to PEN/Faulkner. Caroline is going to come onto the virtual stage.

Caroline: Hi, everyone. Thank you, Glory. Like Glory said, my name is Caroline Schreiber, I'm Penn Faulkner's Director of development. I want to thank all of our authors, echo Glory's thanks to them for being here tonight, for sharing their perspectives on this very intense issue. I'm so glad you all were able to join us, and so glad you got to read from your books here at the end. I think the event would not have been complete it, so thank you.

I also want to thank everybody watching at home for attending, and for supporting programs like this one. If you're not yet a PEN/Faulkner donor, I invite you to become one tonight. Your support helps to fund programs like tonight's conversation, as well as our education programs, which serve thousands of students at Title I schools all across D.C., and of course, our annual awards celebrating the very best in contemporary fiction.

If you enjoyed tonight's conversation, we'd also like you to join us for our upcoming Literary State of the Union event that'll be held on Friday, October 21st at the Willard Hotel here in D.C. It'll be a big party, including an open bar, dinner, dessert, the chance to mix and mingle and connect with 21 of your favorite local D.C. authors. $75 tickets are available now, and I believe there's a link in the chat that Alina has added. We hope to see you there if you're available later this month. Thank you all

again for attending tonight. We hope to see you again very soon. Have a great night. Be safe.

[01:24:08] [END OF AUDIO]