



WSIRN Episode 213: Art, fear, and discovering great books
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Kate DiCamillo

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[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 213.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading, and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

Readers, this is about the time that I start remembering all of those little gifts that I meant to get for people—my kids teachers, that lovely person at church, my cousin out of town. I have a few go to gifts for certain occasions and while I don't typically go around giving my own book as gifts I do think my book *I'd Rather Be Reading* would be a perfect gift for the readers in your life.

It's a small book—typically about \$15—but it's unique and a little more personal to say to your gift recipient that you recognize them as a kindred spirit and you believe the dedication was made for them where I say it's "for everyone who's ever finished a book under the covers with a flashlight when they were supposed to be sleeping."

Find *I'd Rather Be Reading: the delights and dilemmas of the reading life* at your local bookstore, at Barnes and Noble, Books a Million or online wherever you buy your new books.

This week I'm chatting with reader and children's book writer Kate DiCamillo about the books that inspired her to dream up stories, and the hopeful work of writing for children, and what she

learns from readers, that's YOU, about her own books. Kate has so much to share about the value of friendship with other people who work differently than you do, and her advice is applicable whether you're an aspiring author or a reader looking to build a bookish community in your own personal life.

This is such a fun episode. Let's get to it!

Kate, welcome to the show.

[00:01:54]

KATE: Thank you.

ANNE: It's great to talk to you in-person as a parent to young readers and as one with nieces and nephews and I pop in the library all the time. I'm no stranger to your books, but I do feel like I've been kinda chasing you the past few weeks. So first I went to my local library and heard Ann Patchett speak about *The Dutch House*.

KATE: Oh. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: I don't know if you know this, but she talks about you when she talks about *The Dutch House*.

KATE: Heh. I do know that, bless her. I don't know that it is ... Isn't that a beautiful book? Have you read *The Dutch House*?

ANNE: Yes, well first I read it on paper, and now I'm listening to Tom Hanks read it to me.

KATE: Oh, isn't that something.

ANNE: Now, she said something fasc - well, two fascinating things. First of all, am I mistaken or does she call you Fluffy?

KATE: [LAUGHS] So it's funny because Ann and I are both touring at the same time, and she's usually beating me to any venue. Like I was in Dallas week before last [ANNE LAUGHS] and then did the same venue that she had done at The Dallas Museum of Arts. People came to the line and said, Fluffy! So, yes, she does.

ANNE: I thought she did. But then there's a character in *The Dutch House* named Fluffy and I thought maybe I was just really tired. Okay.

KATE: [LAUGHS] It's Fluffy DiCamillo.

[00:03:08]

ANNE: But I understand your connection to Ann Patchett goes way back before you even met her. Is that right?

KATE: When I first moved to Minneapolis, I worked in a book warehouse.

ANNE: How long ago was that?

KATE: That was 1994 when I moved here. I loved this warehouse. I was assigned to the third floor, which was all children's books, but it was just this big warehouse full of books and we could roam around it. I found *The Magician's Assistant*, and then went back and read her first two books and just have been a fan of hers ever since. And so to have your heroes become your friends and to have your heroes read your words is just something else.

ANNE: She said something fascinating, but she didn't elaborate, but when she talked about *The Dutch House*, something that I so enjoyed hearing was her process, writing the book and the pieces that she put in place to determine what kind of story she was going to tell. But also she talked a lot about fixing the book when it wasn't quite working, and you were instrumental in fixing the book. You hadn't read the book. You all talked a little bit about her woes with the book, and then she said, you sent her the last paragraph. Not having read the book, and sure enough, it turned out to be the last paragraph.

KATE: Well.

ANNE: True story?

KATE: [LAUGHS] Yes. This is what happened. We were at the beginning of our friendship. She's like, I'm working on a novel. And I said, I'm working on a novel, too. She said, what's your novel about? I said I can't tell you or my teeth will fall out. [ANNE LAUGHS] And that goes back to process because she and I worked very differently, and then she said, you know, that she was struggling I think, she said that she was struggling with the ending. And I said okay, well, tell me the - the main character's name and tell me the title and I'll write an ending for you. And she said from the beginning, I think I'll use this. And I'm like, oh come on! [BOTH LAUGH] No you won't.

ANNE: Were you being flippant? Were you being funny?

KATE: Yeah! I was just like, you know, I just I wrote a paragraph knowing the title, knowing the character, and knowing that I was writing to a literary hero of mine that I was just starting to become friends with, and I never in a million years thinking that, you know, she was going to use it. But she said from the beginning, I think - I think this is it. I think this will work. And I just thought she was kinda pulling my leg, but consistently, and then I got to read the novel in manuscript and there it was.

[00:05:24]

ANNE: Anw how did it strike you?

KATE: Surreal. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: That's a good answer.

KATE: Yeah. It's ... Yeah. And like I said, she and I work so differently. I never talk about what I'm working on until like, I'm done with it, and she kinda knows where she's going to go. She writes in her head, carries it around in her head working on it before she ever sits down to write. And I sit down with an image or a word or a name and I start not knowing anything about what's going to happen. So, it's just - it's so different and it's so remarkable to have her in my life and to talk to her about everything.

ANNE: Well I think it's so interesting for readers to hear that of all the books they loved, there is no one right path to creation.

KATE: It is so necessary for people to hear that because ultimately, it's such a mystery how it gets done. [ANNE LAUGHS] All of us are always looking for the way to do it. Somebody to tell you how to do it. The only thing that is, like, an absolute is you have to sit down and write it at some point. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Oh. There's the rum.

KATE: Right? But other than that, there's just like, I know so many writers and nobody works in the same way. You know? And that's part of what you need to discover if you want to write a book is how am I going to go on this journey with myself?

ANNE: When did you realize that not everyone starts the way that you do with an image? With just one piece of information?

KATE: I mean, I've known that for awhile. It's funny because it makes me think of ... I did a school visit. It was in this big auditorium talking to kids about writing and I said something about process, and how it's different for everybody and how I don't use an outline and this boy raised his hand and he said, what if you're in a writing class and your teacher says that you have to use an outline? And I'm like, is - is that teacher in the auditorium now? [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: That's a great question.

KATE: And - and she was, and so I turned to her and I said, if I was a 5th grader in your class right now and you told me that this is the way I had to write a story, I wouldn't be able to do it. And I've known that, you know, for a long time that I can't work in that way. And I've known for a long time because I've been writing for a long time and have been in writing workshops for a

long time that everybody works in a different way. But for some reason, people still think there's a right way, you know? [BOTH LAUGH]

[00:07:50]

ANNE: Oh, bless that kid's heart. That is a really great question.

KATE: And as I say to kids, a lot of times, a teacher will raise their hand and say, what's your advice for young writers or a kid will raise their hand and say, what's your advice for me as somebody who wants to be a writer and it's just ... I always have the same advice, whether you're ten or 60 'cause I can guarantee you that any room of 500 people, there are as many adults in there who want to write as there are kids, you know.

ANNE: Oh, that's so interesting.

KATE: Yeah.

ANNE: So, Kate, what's your advice to those aspiring writers?

KATE: [LAUGHS] My advice is read. Read as much as you can. Write. This seems like a no-brainer, but I'm a person who's spent a long time wanting to do it and not writing. So you have to find some way to make a deal with yourself about how you're going to do the work. And it's different for everybody, but you have to find a way to do the work of writing. You have to rewrite. Like this is a shock because for kids, they're told that all the time, that adults for some reason, that oh, this is something I'm supposed to do, so I'm going to sit down and it's going to come out right the first time. And it's not. So read, write, rewrite, keep a notebook, and stare at everything. [ANNE LAUGHS] It's ... There's a wonderful quote ...

ANNE: I mean I'm laughing because it sounds so simple, but I know - I know that you mean this.

KATE: I do! I mean it with my whole heart! There's a wonderful Flannery O'Connor quote, "The writer must never be ashamed of staring and there is nothing that does not require her attention." So I say to the kids, everything is your business. Humanity's your business if you want to write, and the natural world is your business and all of it. So if you carry that notebook around with you and stare, the notebook is a reminder to, like, keep everything open, your eyes and your ears and your mind and your heart.

ANNE: Do you still have a notebook in your bag?

KATE: I have a notebook sitting in front of me right now.

ANNE: Is it always sitting in front of you?

KATE: It's never very far from me. [LAUGHS]

[00:09:56]

ANNE: So what are you jotting down?

KATE: Oh, I haven't jotted anything down, but it's here should I ... the last words that are written in here are quotes. It's "durable enchantments," and it's some interview in the Paris Review.

ANNE: Ooh.

KATE: And I just ... I love that phrase, durable enchantments. And I think, hm, now of course I've said it out loud so I can't use it to turn it into a story, but it's still ... They seem like pertinent words, so I wrote them down in the notebook.

ANNE: They do. Now I love how you said both write and rewrite as important parts of the process.

KATE: Oh, my goodness, yes.

ANNE: You don't write with an outline, and yet I just finished *Beverly Right Here*.

KATE: Thank you for reading it.

ANNE: It was my pleasure. As a reader and writer, it's difficult to imagine reading *Beverly Right Here* and thinking that you didn't know where the story was going when you sat down because as I read it, it's layered. It's nuanced. It's several story threads going on. It seems so rich. I imagine that very few of us can sit down and tell a story like that on the first go, and I would love to hear the difference between the first draft and where *Beverly Right Here* ended up.

KATE: Process is fascinating to me. For one reason, because it's so different for everybody, but two because it's, like, mysterious to me how I work. I mean, I know logistically how I work. This story I started off with I know what happens immediately. Buddy died, and that's Beverly's dog. And I know that she leaves home. I write a whole rough draft that kinda looks like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* wrote it.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] That is not what I expected.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Right. You say that to kids and they don't totally get it 'cause that just not [ANNE LAUGHS] that's not ... adults ...

ANNE: Children are the best.

KATE: Yeah. So, I mean, it is ... It just looks ... You know, I don't pay attention to spelling, punctuation. I don't capitalize. It is just ... It's kinda just like this rough. It's single spaced. And I'm

just kinda following behind Beverly as she does this. I really literally have no idea where she's going to go or what's going to happen. And as a sidebar to all of this, I'll say for everybody that's got vacation plans to come to Minnesota, you can go to the University of Minnesota and visit the Kerlan collection there K-E-R-L-A-N which has my rough drafts and rough drafts of lots of children's books writers. And also, original art for children's books, artists, and you can look at this process. But so, it is this terrible, hideous first rough draft [ANNE LAUGHS] where I'm just following Beverly and it makes almost no sense, but it is coherent enough I get to understand the story, where she's going.

[00:12:44]

ANNE: Do you write this in a week? A month? A year?

KATE: I write it two pages at time, and I would have to go and look at that draft to know exactly how long it is. I can say probably off the top of my head, it was probably 60 pages that way. And then I let it sit. I print it up and I let it sit for at least two weeks and then without reading it, I come back and put it to the left of the computer and I start to retype and now I'm double spacing and I'm paying attention to how things are spelled and I'm indenting and I'm putting dialogue quotes around things. And I slowly make my way through a second draft and then I do it again for the third draft. By the time I get up to the fourth draft, those things where you're talking about it being layered, I can kind of see out of the corner of my eye that there's a deeper meaning to things and I feel like my job is not to look at that directly but to just kinda be aware of it and let my subconscious do the work. Or really how I think of it as is the story at that point is smarter than I am. So I just kinda like, need to get out of my own way, and let the story tell me.

And then what happens is like, you know, this book has been out for a month and I - I do all the interviews and I talk to people and every reader that I talk to gives me more insight into what the story's about and those things that are in there that I wasn't seeing out of the corner of my eye. They're a lot of wings in this book. You would think that I put them in there on purpose, but...

ANNE: Oh, interesting.

KATE: But I couldn't even put that together until I did an interview with somebody who said there are a lot of wings in this book, and I'm like, there are?

ANNE: Something that we know about What Should I Read Next listeners is they are very interested in how the books they love to read get made and what happens behind-the-scenes. It's fascinating to hear. Now at this point, you've written almost 20 books.

KATE: Yeah, it's actually more than 20.

ANNE: [GASPS] Oh, is it really? Do you know? Do you lose count at a certain point [KATE LAUGHS] or do you authors always know, like yes, it's 47 and a half actually.

[00:14:55]

KATE: No, I don't always know, but because I talked to kids so much is the kind of question that kids ask. 'Cause they think in that very quantitative way and so again, the last time I was out, a kid asked, and I'm like, I think it's this, and then, like, when I got back home, I sat down and counted it up. So I'm at 25 right now.

ANNE: Congratulations.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Thank you.

ANNE: So 25 books in, has your process evolved over time?

KATE: It's still basically the same. It's two pages. It's multiple drafts. Where it's changed a little bit is when I'm in the fifth or sixth draft, I will let myself do multiple sessions in a day, so I say, okay. I'm just ... I can get up as soon as I do two pages, which is what I always tell myself, but I will do, you know, several sessions jollying myself along each time by saying this is the only session. [ANNE LAUGHS] But other than that, it hasn't changed very much. I move slowly. I rewrite. I don't outline. All of that has stayed the same.

ANNE: When you say you measure in pages, is that by Word count? Do you write in Microsoft Word or something like that? How do you know?

KATE: I do write in Microsoft Word and I never think in terms of word count. I only think in terms of pages. It's always like, somebody will talk to me about the number of words and it's like, what? Where is that? [ANNE LAUGHS] And then I'll have to look around and find it on the document. Yeah, but no, I just think in terms of pages, and as soon as ... Like when I'm on that first draft, which is the scariest one, as soon as I hit those two pages, I'm up. I don't care if it's mid sentence. It's just like... I get up as soon as it's done, and the other thing that works for me is to get up and do it first thing. You know, before I can talk myself out of it. So I've got a coffee maker that you know, you can, it's set for 5 o'clock in the morning. I hear that go off. I smell it, which is great. And I come downstairs, pour myself a cup of coffee, go in there and do the two pages before I can talk myself out of doing the two pages.

ANNE: You mentioned talking to kids and how they ask different questions, which makes so much sense, but I hadn't thought about that. Do kids ask questions that you wish adults would also ask?

KATE: Kids ... One, if you're in a room full of adults, my favorite part of going out and speaking is to get to the Q&A. As opposed to standing behind a podium and being the author and I never even think of myself as an author. I think of myself as a writer, which is to me a totally different thing. Author is like you've arrived somewhere and writer is you got up and you wrote this morning, you know?

[00:17:32]

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I like that.

KATE: I just ... I like interacting with people rather than speaking at them, and you never know what people are going to ask. But if you have a room full of 500 adults and you say, who's got questions? Takes a long time for the adults to start asking questions. But the kids, all the hands will go up. They will ask everything and anything from how old you are to are you ever afraid? And questions that adults just don't want to be caught asking, but I'm glad to talk about, you know. And adults feel like they have to ask a really important question, kids just know that every question is important, you know?

ANNE: Yeah. I guess adults are better at editing themselves.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Right.

ANNE: Or worse at editing themselves depending on how you want to hear that.

KATE: Right. And it's a joy to talk with them and also you can never ever phone it in. Because you never know what's going to come out of the kids' mouth, you know. You have to be present with them and I love that.

ANNE: They make you a better version of the writer.

KATE: Yeah. They make me a better version of the person and - and just like writing for them, it's funny you would say a better version because you know, when I started writing. I started where most people start, which is short stories, thinking they're short therefore they're easier, which is of course, completely erroneous. [ANNE LAUGHS] And - and sending those short stories to literary magazines. That's where most of my rejection letters came from, and then when I got the job at the book warehouse, slowly, slowly, I started to read the books on the third floor, which was all kids books. And I started to think, you know, I'd like to try to do something like this. And the book that I read where I cautiously formed that thought is a novel called *The Watsons Go To Birmingham - 1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis.

ANNE: Yeah.

KATE: You know that book. It's a great book. And so, all of that, I'm getting around, I am actually going to make a point here is I started writing for kids very quickly I had to just ... a sense that it made me into a different kind of writer. And I didn't have the words for that until Katherine Paterson, who also writes for kids said, when you write for kids, you're duty bound and with hope. And I didn't know that consciously, but I could feel it, and so, I like the writer that I am when I write for kids because of that. It

. I found that, you know, so people will say, when are you going to write a book for adults? And it's like, I feel like I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. Doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

[00:20:09]

ANNE: That's a good feeling.

KATE: Yeah.

ANNE: Kate, do you remember what it was about *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* that made you think, oh, yes, this.

KATE: Yeah! I do. I do. And the funny thing is it's coming up on an anniversary for that and I've spoken so much about that book that they ask me if I would ... There were several introductions, and I wrote one of the introductions, so in order to do that, I had to go back and reread it, which is something that I hadn't done and it's like, oh boy, I hope it's as good as I remember. And it is.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Oh, isn't that a terrifying feeling though?

KATE: Yeah!

ANNE: Like oh book, you meant so much to me. Don't let me down.

KATE: Yeah, it was so central to - to the course of my life. I mean, at the time that the feeling I had, it was so funny. So warm. It's about a family, and the family is so loving, and so it's like you're taken in to this family. It's 1963. They go to Birmingham, and so it deals with something that happens in Birmingham that is just unbelievably terrible. So it's a book that tells the truth, but it also makes you feel safe and loved and seen at the same time. I wasn't able to articulate it. I just ... I want to write something that makes somebody feel this way. I'm going to tell them the truth, and I'm also going to make them feel safe and loved. That's what that book gave me, and that's what set me off down this path.

ANNE: Your last three books, there was *Raymie Nightingale*, *Louisiana's Way Home*, *Beverly Right Here*, can you tell I'm on a first name basis with your character's though? [KATE LAUGHS] I think that's a good thing. They're not books where nothing sad happens, like far from it, and yet they tell the truth and I hope make the reader, as well as the character in the book, eventually, because you're getting to that hopeful place, feel safe, and loved and seen. I think it makes the reader feel like it's okay that things are really hard. It's hard and it's going to be okay. So now I'm thinking, that's not an accident.

KATE: Oh, well what a lovely assessment on your part. How wonderful that maybe I could make a reader feel the way Christopher Paul Curtis made me feel standing in the warehouse reading that book. From the very beginning of my writing life, there's been this thing about there are hard things in the books, and it's always been baffling to me because kids live in the same world that we do. And things are hard here. Things are beautiful here, but things are challenging here. It's hard to be a human being. It takes a lot of bravery to love. That's true, whether you're a kid or an

adult. It seems like you would have to acknowledge those things in order to tell a story that matters and you wouldn't want to lie to kids.

[00:22:52]

ANNE: Oh, no, because they will sniff you out so fast.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Right. They will.

ANNE: Kate, I think it's so interesting and also very gratifying that you named reading as one of the essential components to being a good writer, and after hearing about these books that are so important to you, I can't wait to hear more about your favorites.

KATE: So, kids always say, what's your favorite book, and it's like, are you kidding me?

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Of course they do.

KATE: Yeah. One - one book? And any time I say that to a kid, it's like, ok, are you reader? Uh-huh. Okay. Tell me your favorite book. And then they're like, oh man, I can't do that. [ANNE LAUGHS] And it's like right? So I just pulled out some of my favorites, books that I go back to a lot, to re-read.

ANNE: Well we don't have to call them favorites then. I can't wait to hear what you chose as your three well-loved reads and we'll see what we can find for you to read next.

KATE: Oh, I can't wait to get my book recommendations. That's kinda like getting my fortune told. [ANNE LAUGHS] I'm super excited about that part of it. So -

ANNE: It is like getting your fortune told, isn't it? I had never thought about that.

KATE: Yeah, no, it's just like I can't wait for that.

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Readers, you know I think this is the perfect season for cozying up with a good book. And this holiday season, it's also the perfect time to gift the ones you love with something a little cozier. Like bedding, loungewear, towels and more from Brooklinen. And right now Brooklinen is celebrating their Days Of Gifting, with daily promotions on different items.

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ANNE: So of all the books you could have chosen, which three came up in the little lottery today?

[00:26:44]

KATE: *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*, which I go back to all the time. You know, it's funny because I got assigned Eudora Welty stories in college, but you know, now I'm 55 years old, and so every time I come back to this collection and every time I reread these stories, some of them that I've been reading since college, I come back as a different and changed person, and get more out of it each time I reread. And dog-ear more pages and different pages each time. I can't do a better job of talking about that than Ann Patchett has done. She - she wrote a new intro to *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* and she talks about [LAUGHS] reading this one story about a girl scout visiting an old - a nursing home and how when you read it when you're younger, you're like horrified by the clutching grasp of the old people and you're very much on the side of the girl scout. And then you come back to it as a 55-year-old, and you think, would it kill you to sit down and talk to these ladies? You know, so it's that - it's the constant...

ANNE: Oh.

KATE: ... Insight into yourself and into humanity and it's constantly changing. So this is one of those books that has been a part of my reading life since college, but that I literally reread the whole thing every year and make a point to do it because it always gives me something. So that was an easy one to pull off the shelf and say, "yes, this one."

ANNE: Well now I feel like I'm having my fortune told because I haven't read Eudora Welty since college, but I made an off-handed comment to my husband a year or two ago and said, oh, I would like to read her again. And so he gave me an edition of this book for Christmas last year, but I haven't read it yet, Kate.

KATE: What?!

ANNE: But I can see it. It's right here by my desk. I think I was just waiting for the right moment.

KATE: Is it the one with the photograph on the front?

ANNE: It's green and yellow. I mean, there is a photograph, but it's small. It's not huge.

[00:28:43]

KATE: Yup. Yup, yup, yup, yup. Lucky you. That's what I have to think.

ANNE: I'm going to have to read that Girl Scout story.

KATE: *A Visit of Charity* is the title. But you will be well served to start with the first story and move all the way to the end. Every story is a gift in a different way. I cannot recommend it strongly enough.

ANNE: Okay, Kate, what's your next much-loved book?

KATE: Let's talk about Ann Patchett.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Let's do it.

KATE: I pulled the book before *Dutch House, Commonwealth*, which came out three years ago. I have reread this multiple times as well. I read it in an advanced reading copy before it came out and then I have gone back to it for myself as a reader, but also for myself as a writer. Because she does something in it that really to me seems impossible, but yet, she pulls it off. And that is she moves within a single paragraph to different points of view without ever losing the reader and it is something that I have as a writer never mastered, and so I've gone back to this book looking for that, and then it's so well done that I lose sight of the technique and I just fall into the story again.

ANNE: That's high praise.

KATE: You know, everybody's reading *The Dutch House* now which is great and I loved *The Dutch House*, but it's also ... if you missed *Commonwealth*, go back and read *Commonwealth*.

ANNE: *Commonwealth* has one of my favorite exchanges that I've ever read, Franny is talking to a writer, an older esteemed writer, and he says, tell me about you. Did you ever want to be a writer? And she says no. I only ever wanted to be a reader. [KATE LAUGHS] And of course he's relieved, but something about the way she wrote it and something about I think we both do, you talk to a lot of readers who want to be writers, who do it as a means to an end. Not necessarily just a means to enjoyment, and I just ... I think of those lines all the time.

KATE: Yeah. That's .. I remember that exchange, and it's like, it stops you short almost, doesn't it?

ANNE: It does. [LAUGHS]

KATE: Yeah, it does. And you know, when kids ask why did you become a writer? I have so many different answers, but one of them is always well because I was a reader and I do think

after awhile you want to tell a story back, but not everybody does, you know? But that was certainly part of it for me. I got in the airport. This is one of the pleasures of traveling now is like, there's a lot of literature in the airport and so, one this last trip I got Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered*. Have you read that?

[00:31:19]

ANNE: I have indeed. I read that in the Smoky Mountains on a camping trip, largely by flashlight by the fire.

KATE: Oh my goodness.

ANNE: Which I gotta say, I think Barbara Kingsolver would approve of.

KATE: No kidding. I'm just entranced. Let's just say that. I'm entranced. And I'm not done, but I can recommend it wholeheartedly, and you would recommend it wholeheartedly too, I would think.

ANNE: There's this feeling that comes with reading certain authors, especially authors that you as a reader have a long relationship with, where you start reading the story and you just kinda like sink into it and you relax and you think, I am in good hands here.

KATE: Yes, yes, yes! It's that exactly. You can give yourself over to it, 110%. You're being told a story but you're also, there's another part of you that is always thinking about what it means to be alive now and also to be in the world. It's just, it's beautiful, and just a really compelling read and you're right. You never doubt her for a second, which is part of what you always want. I'm just thinking it as I'm just talking about this. It's three women, which I didn't intend, but that's the way it is. Eudora Welty, Ann Patchett, Barbara Kingsolver.

ANNE: I like it. [KATE LAUGHS] Three southern women actually also.

KATE: Yes, that's very true.

ANNE: And you're in Minnesota, but you're not from Minneapolis.

KATE: No, I grew up in central Florida.

ANNE: Now that you say that, I'm thinking I knew that because and hearing about *Raymie Nightingale*, *Louisiana*, *Beverly*. Raymie's a Floridian, isn't she? It's now been a couple years.

KATE: Yeah, yes she definitely is. That's good memory given how many books you read.

ANNE: I think Kingsolver is out in Arizona now, but she's got her roots down here. I'm in Louisville, so we like to claim her.

[00:33:03]

KATE: Remember *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*? It was her going back and living on the farm in Kentucky.

ANNE: Yes.

KATE: Yeah.

ANNE: That made me very happy.

KATE: Me too.

ANNE: As a reader. I mean there are many readers to feel connections to books you love, but that, you know, that one of physicality is a powerful one.

KATE: Yup, yup, yup.

ANNE: Kate, tell me about a book that didn't work for you.

KATE: You know, this is the thing about having written books. [ANNE LAUGHS] I know how hard it is.

ANNE: Uh-huh.

KATE: I know how hard you try. I know that also I can read a book and love it. I make a pile of my books that I've read, and you know, this one to this friend, this one to that friend, and some of them I'll just give away and this one I would never give away. But that's how things get sorted around here. All of that is to say that a book that I love sometimes another very readerly friend will not, and so, I just never want to say this didn't work for me because so much of it I know is taste, and also because I know how much of your heart you expose to write a book. And I just wouldn't want to hear on a podcast how I had failed somebody. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Oh, it's absolutely taste. Have you stopped to think how you would articulate your taste as a reader?

KATE: Well, you and I can, well one, you're going to recommend a book to me, so I already like churning through all of that. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: That program is constantly engaged. I don't think there's an off switch.

KATE: [LAUGHS] I guess you could say I'm realistic fiction, and I'm about connections.

[00:34:40]

ANNE: Ooh.

KATE: I want people to connect. I want heart. I want humanity. I know myself as a reader, as eight-years-old standing in the library in Clermont, Florida looking at the spin rack [ANNE LAUGHS] of you know -

ANNE: Oh, I love that visual.

KATE: [LAUGHS] And what I would reach out for and it wasn't science fiction. You know, that's not where I go instinctually. Fantasy or post-apocalyptic, but then, there's an exception to every rule.

ANNE: And doesn't that make the reading life grand?

KATE: Yeah! *Station Eleven*, have you read that?

ANNE: Oh I love that so much.

KATE: And that's you know, what is that? The description of that book I would say yeah, probably not for me.

ANNE: Have you read her new one?

KATE: No. Ann said it's spectacular. I haven't. I can't wait. Everybody should read *Station Eleven*.

ANNE: I want to know if Emily St. John Mandel writes with an outline. I'm thinking you have to, but then you don't know how another writer works and what they can pull off in their brains because they don't have the same programming that you do.

KATE: Right. Well, you'll have her on the show at some point and you can ask her that.

ANNE: Well maybe I should. I just recently read *The Glass Hotel* and I inhaled it. Really enjoyed it. It's not coming out til March, but that's not so far away at this point. I read an interview with Emily St. John Mandel where she said I don't know how to write novels that unfold from beginning to end. I only know how to write novels that jump around in time, and I thought, oh, that's so interesting.

KATE: Wow.

[00:36:10]

ANNE: And do you have a giant bulletin board on your wall? Or do you just sit down and go here we are in 1999 and here we are in 1994 and here we are in 2017? I don't know, but I'd like to.

KATE: You were wondering what's going in the notebook. [ANNE LAUGHS] There it goes.

ANNE: I'm happy to hear it. Something that I think is helpful for readers to know, many already know this and I think it's very freeing in their reading life, but for some it's a realization, and that is that there's a difference between a book that is to your taste and a book that is well written. Those can be entirely different things.

KATE: Yes! Absolutely.

ANNE: So we tried to talk about books in a way that lets a reader think about their own reading life, and I definitely think there is a time for reading a book that is maybe not maybe to your taste, like we all need to push ourselves or be pushed in that way sometimes.

KATE: And that's what wonderful about this podcast. Like the more people who are in your life, who are reading differently because this goes back to *Station Eleven*. It was a reader, a reader friend that I trusted when she said this, you have to read this. It's one of those books where I sat down on the front porch and I thought, I've got to read this because Julie needs it back. [ANNE LAUGHS] You know, because she wanted it back, and it's like, I'll just move through it really ... And I didn't get up. But I wouldn't have done it unless you know, she said this is a book that you have to read. So it's just like, you have to trust yourself enough to go into a book that wouldn't be normally something you think you might like, but also surround yourself with readers who are always pushing the boundaries too.

ANNE: Okay, I have a cold right now, and it's really useful to me as a reader to - to know like okay. I just want a cup of tea and I want to curl up in my chair and feel better, and to be able to know how to pick a book for that circumstance.

KATE: Yes.

ANNE: And to have people who say this is a little different for you. This is going to be a stretch, but I think it's going to be worth making that stretch. You need both.

KATE: There's a book called *Art and Fear*, which is a book about making art by two art professors, Bayles and Orland. Those are their last names if anybody wants to look for the book, and they talk about how whatever you're working on now has the seeds of the next project in it. And it's the same way with your reading life. It's just like, you think, okay, I'm going to stretch myself and I'm going to read this, but then that opens the door for the next book that you might not have read, you know? So it's just like this ever expanding universe.

[00:38:42]

ANNE: You know what that makes me think of is you've written a good number of standalones, but you've also written several series, and I would love to hear at what point did you know that *Raymie Nightingale* was going to be ... Do you describe it as a series? *Raymie*, *Louisiana*, *Beverly*, they're connected.

KATE: The publisher describes it as a trilogy, which I'm actually grateful for those people in the marketing rooms and how they come up with that because that is more of how I think of it or they say companion novels.

ANNE: That's a good way to put it.

KATE: And - and when did I think of it? I ... You know, I thought I was done when I wrote *Raymie*. And I've learned to know the done feeling, and I thought I've taken these characters to a safe place. And I am now done. But Louisiana's voice, she's kinda like, you know, the wedding guest in the rhyme of the ancient mariner, you know, like she pulled me. Literally it was almost, it was a demand. And her voice was so overwhelming. But again with the notebook that I always carry around 'cause that's where Louisiana's voice showed up, 'cause I'll jot down things that I hear. I didn't intend to do it, and if I had set out intending to do it, I wouldn't have been able to do it. [BOTH LAUGH] You know?

ANNE: I don't know. I mean, I can imagine what the reasons might be, but I don't know what your reasons are. Do you think if would have felt too stultifying?

KATE: It's the same as you say I'm going to sit down and write a novel. No, you sit down and you say, no, I'm going to write two pages now. And so, I'm going to write a trilogy now.

ANNE: Ohhh. Yeah.

KATE: Oh my goodness. You wouldn't get out of bed. [ANNE LAUGHS] So...

ANNE: I don't know. You can still smell that coffee.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Right well you'll get out of bed and drink the coffee and feel sorry for yourself about what you couldn't do. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: I'm glad it didn't work out that way.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Yeah, no, it's a really - if I had thought of that, it's too intimidating. I would have never done it.

[00:40:34]

ANNE: Well, I'm glad it didn't happen that way. So you just had a book come out. You're still touring for it I imagine for *Beverly Right Here*. Not like that's not enough, Kate, but what are you working on? Or what are you dreaming of working on next?

KATE: Well, what a lovely way of saying it, dreaming of working on. So, because everything now is kinda taking up with touring, but I have a novel that I have rewritten now twice for my editor, which those are the big rewrites. The next thing that we will do together is do the line edits. And what's it about a kid would say, at this point, and I would say, if you follow me out to the parking lot after this event and threaten me with bodily harm, I still wouldn't tell you. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: Because you don't talk about it.

KATE: I don't because if I talk about it, even now when it's, like, so close to being a thing, it dissipates the energy or the magic of it for me. And like if I talk about it really early on, I don't write it if I talk about it. I won't talk about it until maybe it's in first pages, which is the first round of typesetting. Maybe then I would talk about it, but probably not until it's in last pages.

ANNE: Well you know I wouldn't press you. [KATE LAUGHS] We just talk about what we're reading instead.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Right, and you know what I'm reading now. I'm reading the Barbara Kingsolver. I also have got a Paris review that I'm working my way through, and I've got *Trinity*, which is about Oppenheimer. Have you read that?

ANNE: About Oppenheimer? No, I'm thinking of the Leon Jarvis novel from a million years ago.

KATE: Yeah, no, this is Louisa Hall. She's a poet mostly, but this is like, kinda like, a fictional rummeration on all the different people that Oppenheimer knew, and it's really, really good. And also makes you think. *The Nickel Boys* is something ... Have you read it?

ANNE: I have read it.

KATE: I mean, like, that is unbelievable. I thought it was fantastic.

ANNE: It's a doozy. So excellent.

KATE: It's like the kind of book where I had to put it down 'cause it just kills you. You know, so I would have to ... I could only do it in small bursts because it was so painful. And so beautiful.

ANNE: Oh, there is no promise of hope there.

KATE: Other than ... Well, we won't give away the end, but at the end, in that restaurant.

[00:43:01]

ANNE: That is true.

KATE: So, yeah, that's what's going on here in the reading world.

ANNE: Kate, is there anything you would like to be different in your reading life or that you would like more of in your reading life right now?

KATE: I would love to have a day [LAUGHS] where I could just read. The airplane rides when I'm traveling are such a gift 'cause I can just sit and read and read and read, but I would love to have an uninterrupted period, three hours in the middle of the day. That would be like, wouldn't that be delightful? And maybe at some point I'll get that, but it hasn't happened yet. There's just never enough time but at the same time, I am not fully in my body. That's when I fully become myself is when I'm reading, and so I cannot live without it and so it's always a part of my life. I would just like to have a little bit more of it, I guess, 'cause it centers me.

ANNE: Well my hope for you is that at the end of book tour that can be your reward.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Three hours in your favorite reading spot... What is your favorite reading spot?

KATE: For the winter time, a library, you know, leather library chair by the fireplace. For the summer time, back in my little den. I've got a daybed. So those are the two places that I go in. And I do ... I never get three hours, but I do make sure that at some point in the afternoon, when I'm home, I get like 45 minutes to sit and read and to write a little bit in the notebook. Because like I said, it centers me and sustains me.

ANNE: I love that. And I hope you get more than 45 minutes. My hope is for that leather chair by the fireplace. [KATE LAUGHS] 'Cause otherwise, you're just waiting too long.

KATE: Right?!

ANNE: I mean, summer's not coming to Minnesota until like August.

KATE: Thank you. Thank you. I feel like you've blessed me.

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ANNE: So, Kate, you enjoyed *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*, which incidentally, I'm going to read almost next. I gotta get through the books on my nightstand, and then I can cue up. *Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett, and *Unsheltered* by Barbara Kingsolver. All those play so nicely on the bookshelf together. I mean, even if they didn't, we could work with that. But those books just ... I feel like they should be friends. You know what you like to read, what you're naturally drawn towards, so realistic fiction that is about connections. I love the way you put that. I love seeing that in your work. So my personal soft spot when I'm reading books that have that feel of connections is for the found families and the unlikely, but completely perfect and holy necessary relationships that cross cultural gaps, and also cross generations. I love the relationship at the center of *Beverly Right Here*. It just made me so ... It's so satisfying. It just makes me want to smile and then happy sigh. So I'm not surprised to hear you enjoy reading about it.

And books that have heart and humanity. So I'm going to recommend to books that I think you would enjoy reading next but also any reader who really hears their own taste in their picks that they would enjoy picking up as well. I don't really want to venture into recommending middle grade for you because that is the field in which you are an expert, but any reader who loves your books or loved the books you mentioned here and wants to go the middle grade route, I think they have to read *Short* by Holly Goldberg Sloan.

[00:47:47]

KATE: Oh.

ANNE: Wait, do you know this?

KATE: No, I've read *Counting by 7s* by her, but no, okay, all right. Writing it down.

ANNE: It's all those things. It's about a young girl who is short for her age as you can probably guess by the title. Kate, that reminds me, when I meet people on book tour, they always tell me like, oh gosh, your voice didn't make it sound like you're so tall, and I hear that you have the opposite [BOTH LAUGH] reaction from readers.

KATE: Right, no, and it's funny. This is a long time ... Well maybe like three years ago I was in Walgreens and a lady got in line behind me and she said, I know who you are. [ANNE LAUGHS] And then she said, you're so small and your stories are so tall. And I was...

ANNE: How did you feel about that?

KATE: I felt like it was a huge compliment. It was like, that's uh ... glad I could write tall stories. Yeah, I'm really, I'm very short. You know, my mother always used to say to me, it's great that you're so small otherwise people would beat you up for your mouth. So .. [BOTH LAUGH] So I - I feel like it's been a real blessing that I'm short.

ANNE: Oh, that's not what I expected you to say. [KATE LAUGHS] This book is about Julia who is very small for her age and what happens in the book is not the same as what the book is about. But this poor girl is looking into summer and then nothing before her and it's really not excited about it, but the one thing that she's going to do is the summer theater performance of the Wizard of Oz, which plops her right in the middle of this motley cast of characters that she didn't know she was missing in her life.

What I love about this book is you see a young girl pushing herself in ways she never envisioned. She never thought possible, but she had to, and the way it connects her with herself, just very important at any age, but also in her young life. The way it connects her with the former strangers around her who become just as close as family over the course of one summer. And I have to tell you I understand that you're not a 10-year-old reader, but when my daughter finished reading this, she like burst into tears and I thought, oh honey, what's wrong? I

mean, I'm all for crying at the end of the book, that's fine, but they didn't seem like happy tears. I thought what? What ... What ... Tell me how you're feeling. And she said, I'm just so sad it's over. It was so good. I'm so sad it's over.

[00:50:10]

KATE: Oh, that's fantastic. Well it's in my notebook.

ANNE: I'm happy to hear it.

KATE: I can't wait.

ANNE: Now you love nonfiction but you also love process. Have you read anything by John McPhee? I'm especially thinking of his book *Draft No. 4*.

KATE: I have not read that! But I read John McPhee all the time in the New Yorker is what I know him from. I don't know that I've ever read a book entirely by John McPhee.

ANNE: It's collected essays, so that piece you may have read in The New Yorker is in here, but these are essays on the writing process. And here I'm opening my table of contents. The first thing I read by him that made me think I want to read more was his piece that ran I believe in The New Yorker called *Structure* and he talks about as an author, he had this long form nonfiction piece. I almost told you it's 10,000 words, but you don't care. You don't think in word count. [KATE LAUGHS] That'd be 40 pages in a book, approximately. But he has this piece and he knows he wants to talk about all these things and he has large chunks of them written, but he doesn't know how to bring it together. So he talks about how he mentally walked around the piece looking for the thread that was going to make it hang together.

KATE: Wow.

ANNE: And that's just one of the pieces where he writes about the process of writing and some of his methods are nothing I would have imagined possible.

KATE: I have to say I'm very impressed with you right now. I mean-

ANNE: Well why is that?

KATE: 'Cause like ... Well because I thought [LAUGHS] it's going to be really hard to recommend a book to me that I haven't read. That's what I thought, which is kinda grandiose thought-

ANNE: Well, no, I feel like everybody feels that way when they're talking to readers who have read a lot of books, but oh they're so many books.

KATE: Yeah, no, that's a beautiful recommendation. I'm deeply grateful for it.

[00:51:52]

ANNE: Well, I hope you enjoy - I hope you get the opportunity to read it on an airplane or hopefully in that leather chair.

KATE: The leather chair - that's a leather chair one.

ANNE: Some of the things he does are just astounding to me and the *Draft No. 4* comes from, he talks about how he writes in four very distinct drafts. And *Draft No. 4* has become shorthand at my house and in my brain. By the time he gets to draft number four, I feel like my own drafts aren't as distinct, so it'd be more like draft number 17.7 like by the time I got to his stage, but that's the one where he's looking for exactly the right word and debating, you know, whether you want a colon or an em-dash. Like that's his draft number four.

KATE: Wow.

ANNE: Which might be more like draft number 7 for you, but just talking about just how something goes from idea to finished product is to me and I think also to you endlessly fascinating.

KATE: Oh, I'm excited.

ANNE: All right. I'm going to cut to the chase on the last one. I always want to fish a little bit and well, have you read this? I don't know. William Kent Krueger, *This Tender Land*. Have you?

KATE: No. I ... It's funny 'cause he's from here, too.

ANNE: He is! He's a Minnesota author.

KATE: Yeah, and also, he and I, there's a grant here called The Loft McKnight Grant and he and I both won the same years before either one of us had been published. I remember standing, you know how it's always at the cubes of cheese at the reception, you know? [ANNE LAUGHS] And how lovely he was and I think his first book was coming out then, and I can't remember - what's the one that came before that?

ANNE: I just read his first mystery, and his first novel this summer, at the pool. It was a delight. That's called *Iron Lake*, but he's also very well-known for *Ordinary Grace*, which I'm in the middle of right now. But something that I like about it for you is that he's telling a story about kids. And he's telling it as an adult for adults, but it's a story that is important for every age and it's a story that could easily be retold from a different perspective. And obviously, you don't just like to read middle grade, but I think as someone who writes middle grade, I think it would be interesting to you to see him tell a story about kids for adults.

And this book is set up like an epic adventure. It's being compared to *The Odyssey*. I don't know if that's what he had in his mind, or not. I think he must have been channeling *Huckleberry Finn*. But what happens is these four orphan children who are at a school that is completely heartbreaking. We were just talking about *The Nickel Boys*. Imagine a home for children not too far off that setting that Colson Whitehead sets up in the *Nickel Boys*. But through a series of devastating circumstances, including a tornado. These four children are prodded to escape this dangerous but seemingly safe to the adults around it situation they're in. They get a canoe and they hit the river and they have [LAUGHS] a series of interesting encounters in the villages they stop in along the banks. And of course they look suspicious. They're four orphan children. Oh, this is set during the Great Depression. So this all unfolds in 1932. They form unlikely but important friendships. They get in serious, serious trouble. It's so sad. And yet it remains hopeful throughout, and it doesn't end in a place I expected, but found deeply satisfying.

[00:55:14]

KATE: Wow.

ANNE: How does that sound?

KATE: That sounds fantastic. I'm just listening to you with my mouth hanging open. I can't wait.

ANNE: Well, Kate, of all the books we talked about today, *Short* by Holly Goldberg Sloan, *Draft No. 4* by John McPhee, and *This Tender Land* by William Kent Krueger. Which one do you think you might read next?

KATE: *This Tender Land* because that will be good to travel with. John McPhee will be good for the long leather chair 'cause I can take it slowly. And then *Short* will go upstairs because it will be good to read before I go to sleep. I already like made those decisions as you were talking about which could be be read where. Yeah.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Well I love your reading plans. [KATE LAUGHS] Thank you so much for talking books with me today. It's been a pleasure.

KATE: Thank you.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Kate, and I'd love to hear what YOU think she should read next. That page is at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/213 and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today. You can find Kate on Facebook and on Twitter @KateDiCamillo. DiCamillo is D-I-C-A-M-I-L-L-O. Kate DiCamillo.

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Thanks to the people who make this show happen! What Should I Read Next is produced by Brenna Frederick, with sound design by Kellen Pechacek.

Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.